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THE PRIZE OF PERIL
by Robert Sheckley

Fritz Leiber
Avram Davidson
Theodore R. Cogswell
Gordon R. Dickson

EVERY STORY
in this issue NEW

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THE MAGAZINE OF

Fantasy and Science Fiction

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(*illustrating "The Prize of Peril"*)

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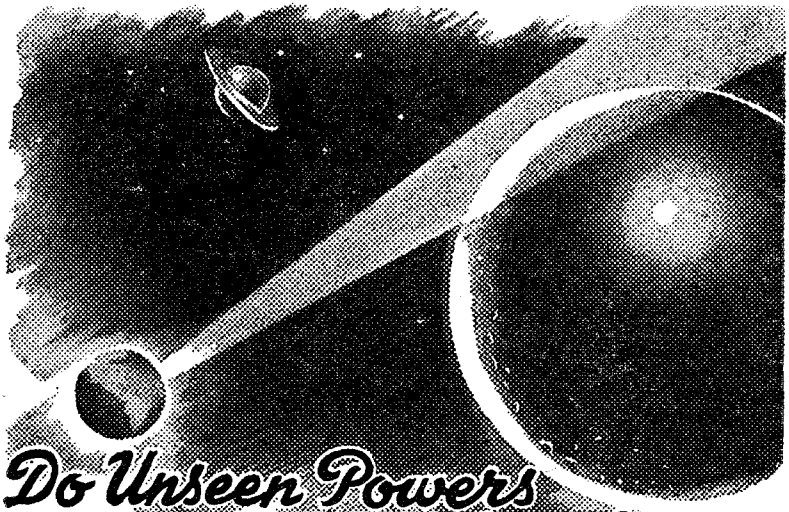

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An action-packed suspense thriller . . . an acute satiric extrapolation of current trends in TV programing . . . a brief and bitter essay on man — Robert Sheckley has managed adroitly to write all three of these at once, in one of his most forceful stories to date.

The Prize of Peril

by ROBERT SHECKLEY

RAEDER LIFTED HIS HEAD CAUTIOUSLY above the window sill. He saw the fire escape, and below it a narrow alley. There was a weatherbeaten baby carriage in the alley, and three garbage cans. As he watched, a black-sleeved arm moved from behind the furthest can, with something shiny in its fist. Raeder ducked down. A bullet smashed through the window above his head and punctured the ceiling, showering him with plaster.

Now he knew about the alley. It was guarded, just like the door.

He lay at full length on the cracked linoleum, staring at the bullet hole in the ceiling, listening to the sounds outside the door. He was a tall man with bloodshot eyes and a two-day stubble. Grime and fatigue had etched lines into his face. Fear had touched his features, tightening a muscle here and twitching a nerve there. The results were startling. His face had character now, for it was reshaped by the expectation of death.

There was a gunman in the alley and two on the stairs. He was trapped. He was dead.

Sure, Raeder thought, he still moved and breathed; but that was only because of death's inefficiency. Death would take care of him in a few minutes. Death would poke holes in his face and body, artistically dab his clothes with blood, arrange his limbs in some grotesque position of the graveyard ballet . . .

Raeder bit his lip sharply. He wanted to live. There had to be a way.

He rolled onto his stomach and surveyed the dingy cold-water apartment into which the killers had driven him. It was a perfect little one-room coffin. It had a door, which was watched, and a fire escape, which was watched. And it had a tiny windowless bathroom.

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He crawled to the bathroom and stood up. There was a ragged hole in the ceiling, almost four inches wide. If he could enlarge it, crawl through into the apartment above . . .

He heard a muffled thud. The killers were impatient. They were beginning to break down the door.

He studied the hole in the ceiling. No use even considering it. He could never enlarge it in time.

They were smashing against the door, grunting each time they struck. Soon the lock would tear out, or the hinges would pull out of the rotting wood. The door would go down, and the two blank-faced men would enter, dusting off their jackets . . .

But surely someone would help him! He took the tiny television set from his pocket. The picture was blurred, and he didn't bother to adjust it. The audio was clear and precise.

He listened to the well-modulated voice of Mike Terry addressing his vast audience.

". . . *terrible spot,*" Terry was saying. "*Yes folks, Jim Raeder is in a truly terrible predicament. He had been hiding, you'll remember, in a third-rate Broadway hotel under an assumed name. It seemed safe enough. But the bellhop recognized him, and gave that information to the Thompson gang.*"

The door creaked under repeated blows. Raeder clutched the little television set and listened.

"*Jim Raeder just managed to escape from the hotel! Closely pursued, he entered a brownstone at one fifty-six West End Avenue. His intention was to go over the roofs. And it might have worked, folks, it just might have worked. But the roof door was locked. It looked like the end . . . . But Raeder found that apartment seven was unoccupied and unlocked. He entered . . .*"

Terry paused for emphasis, then cried: "*—and now he's trapped there, trapped like a rat in a cage! The Thompson gang is breaking down the door! The fire escape is guarded! Our camera crew, situated in a nearby building, is giving you a closeup now. Look, folks, just look! Is there no hope for Jim Raeder?*"

Is there no hope, Raeder silently echoed, perspiration pouring from him as he stood in the dark, stifling little bathroom, listening to the steady thud against the door.

"*Wait a minute!*" Mike Terry cried. "*Hang on, Jim Raeder, hang on a little longer. Perhaps there* is *hope! I have an urgent call from one of our viewers, a call on the Good Samaritan Line! Here's someone who thinks he can help you, Jim. Are you listening, Jim Raeder?*"

Raeder waited, and heard the hinges tearing out of rotten wood.

"*Go right ahead, sir,*" said Mike Terry. "*What is your name, sir?*"

"*Er—Felix Bartholemow.*"

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"Don't be nervous, Mr. Bartholemow. Go right ahead."

"Well, OK. Mr. Raeder," said an old man's shaking voice, *"I used to live at one five six West End Avenue. Same apartment you're trapped in, Mr. Raeder—fact! Look, that bathroom* has *got a window, Mr. Raeder. It's been painted over, but it* has *got a—"*

Raeder pushed the television set into his pocket. He located the outlines of the window and kicked. Glass shattered, and daylight poured startlingly in. He cleared the jagged sill and quickly peered down.

Below was a long drop to a concrete courtyard.

The hinges tore free. He heard the door opening. Quickly Raeder climbed through the window, hung by his fingertips for a moment, and dropped.

The shock was stunning. Groggily he stood up. A face appeared at the bathroom window.

"Tough luck," said the man, leaning out and taking careful aim with a snub-nosed .38.

At that moment a smoke bomb exploded inside the bathroom.

The killer's shot went wide. He turned, cursing. More smoke bombs burst in the courtyard, obscuring Raeder's figure.

He could hear Mike Terry's frenzied voice over the TV set in his pocket. *"Now run for it!"* Terry was screaming. *"Run, Jim Raeder, run for your life. Run* now, *while the killers' eyes are filled with smoke. And thank Good Samaritan Sarah Winters, of three four one two Edgar Street, Brockton, Mass., for donating five smoke bombs and employing the services of a man to throw them!"*

In a quieter voice, Terry continued: *"You've saved a man's life today, Mrs. Winters. Would you tell our audience how it—"*

Raeder wasn't able to hear any more. He was running through the smoke-filled courtyard, past clothes lines, into the open street.

He walked down 63d Street, slouching to minimize his height, staggering slightly from exertion, dizzy from lack of food and sleep.

"Hey you!"

Raeder turned. A middle-aged woman was sitting on the steps of a brownstone, frowning at him.

"You're Raeder, aren't you? The one they're trying to kill?"

Raeder started to walk away.

"Come inside here, Raeder," the woman said.

Perhaps it was a trap. But Raeder knew that he had to depend upon the generosity and good-heartedness of the people. He was their representative, a projection of themselves, an average guy in trouble. Without them, he was lost. With them, nothing could harm him.

Trust in the people, Mike Terry had told him. They'll never let you down.

He followed the woman into her

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parlor. She told him to sit down and left the room, returning almost immediately with a plate of stew. She stood watching him while he ate, as one would watch an ape in the zoo eat peanuts.

Two children came out of the kitchen and stared at him. Three overalled men came out of the bedroom and focused a television camera on him. There was a big television set in the parlor. As he gulped his food, Raeder watched the image of Mike Terry, and listened to the man's strong, sincere, worried voice.

"There he is, folks," Terry was saying. *"There's Jim Raeder now, eating his first square meal in two days. Our camera crews have really been working to cover this for you! Thanks, boys .... Folks, Jim Raeder has been given a brief sanctuary by Mrs. Velma O'Dell, of three forty-three Sixty-Third Street. Thank you, Good Samaritan O'Dell! It's really wonderful, how people from all walks of life have taken Jim Raeder to their hearts!"*

"You better hurry," Mrs. O'Dell said.

"Yes ma'am," Raeder said.

"I don't want no gunplay in my apartment."

"I'm almost finished, ma'am."

One of the children asked, "Aren't they going to kill him?"

"Shut up," said Mrs. O'Dell.

"Yes Jim," chanted Mike Terry, *"you'd better hurry. Your killers aren't far behind. They aren't stupid men, Jim. Vicious, warped, insane —yes! But not stupid. They're following a trail of blood—blood from your torn hand, Jim!"*

Raeder hadn't realized until now that he'd cut his hand on the window sill.

"Here, I'll bandage that," Mrs. O'Dell said. Raeder stood up and let her bandage his hand. Then she gave him a brown jacket and a gray slouch hat.

"My husband's stuff," she said.

"He has a disguise, folks!" Mike Terry cried delightedly. *"This is something new! A* disguise! *With seven hours to go until he's safe!"*

"Now get out of here," Mrs. O'Dell said.

"I'm going, ma'am," Raeder said. "Thanks."

"I think you're stupid," she said. "I think you're stupid to be involved in this."

"Yes ma'am."

"It just isn't worth it."

Raeder thanked her and left. He walked to Broadway, caught a subway to 59th Street, then an uptown local to 86th. There he bought a newspaper and changed for the Manhasset thru-express.

He glanced at his watch. He had six and a half hours to go.

The subway roared under Manhattan. Raeder dozed, his bandaged hand concealed under the newspaper, the hat pulled over his face. Had he been recognized yet? Had he shaken the Thompson gang?

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Or was someone telephoning them now?

Dreamily he wondered if he had escaped death. Or was he still a cleverly animated corpse, moving around because of death's inefficiency? (My dear, death is so *laggard* these days! Jim Raeder walked about for hours after he died, and actually answered people's *questions* before he could be decently buried!)

Raeder's eyes snapped open. He had dreamed something . . . unpleasant. He couldn't remember what.

He closed his eyes again and remembered, with mild astonishment, a time when he had been in no trouble.

That was two years ago. He had been a big, pleasant young man working as a truck driver's helper. He had no talents. He was too modest to have dreams.

The tight-faced little truck driver had the dreams for him. "Why not try for a television show, Jim? I would if I had your looks. They like nice average guys with nothing much on the ball. As contestants. Everybody likes guys like that. Why not look into it?"

So he had looked into it. The owner of the local television store had explained it further.

"You see, Jim, the public is sick of highly trained athletes with their trick reflexes and their professional courage. Who can feel for guys like that? Who can identify? People want to watch exciting things, sure. But not when some joker is making it his business for fifty thousand a year. That's why organized sports are in a slump. That's why the thrill shows are booming."

"I see," said Raeder.

"Six years ago, Jim, Congress passed the Voluntary Suicide Act. Those old senators talked a lot about free will and self-determinism at the time. But that's all crap. You know what the Act really means? It means that amateurs can risk their lives for the big loot, not just professionals. In the old days you had to be a professional boxer or footballer or hockey player if you wanted your brains beaten out legally for money. But now that opportunity is open to ordinary people like you, Jim."

"I see," Raeder said again.

"It's a marvelous opportunity. Take you. You're no better than anyone, Jim. Anything you can do, anyone can do. You're *average*. I think the thrill shows would go for you."

Raeder permitted himself to dream. Television shows looked like a sure road to riches for a pleasant young fellow with no particular talent or training. He wrote a letter to a show called *Hazard* and enclosed a photograph of himself.

Hazard was interested in him. The JBC network investigated, and found that he was average enough to satisfy the wariest viewer. His

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parentage and affiliations were checked. At last he was summoned to New York, and interviewed by Mr. Moulian.

Moulian was dark and intense, and chewed gum as he talked. "You'll do," he snapped. "But not for *Hazard*. You'll appear on *Spills*. It's a half-hour daytime show on Channel Three."

"Gee," said Raeder.

"Don't thank me. There's a thousand dollars if you win or place second, and a consolation prize of a hundred dollars if you lose. But that's not important."

"No sir."

"*Spills* is a *little* show. The JBC network uses it as a testing ground. First- and second-place winners on *Spills* move on to *Emergency*. The prizes are much bigger on *Emergency*."

"I know they are, sir."

"And if you do well on *Emergency* there are the first-class thrill shows, like *Hazard* and *Underwater Perils*, with their nationwide coverage and enormous prizes. And then comes the really big time. How far you go is up to you."

"I'll do my best, sir," Raeder said.

Moulian stopped chewing gum for a moment and said, almost reverently, "You can do it, Jim. Just remember. You're *the people*, and *the people* can do anything."

The way he said it made Raeder feel momentarily sorry for Mr. Moulian, who was dark and frizzy-haired and pop-eyed, and was obviously not *the people*.

They shook hands. Then Raeder signed a paper absolving the JBC of all responsibility should he lose his life, limbs or reason during the contest. And he signed another paper exercising his rights under the Voluntary Suicide Act. The law required this, and it was a mere formality.

In three weeks, he appeared on *Spills*.

The program followed the classic form of the automobile race. Untrained drivers climbed into powerful American and European competition cars and raced over a murderous twenty-mile course. Raeder was shaking with fear as he slid his big Maserati into the wrong gear and took off.

The race was a screaming, tire-burning nightmare. Raeder stayed back, letting the early leaders smash themselves up on the counter-banked hairpin turns. He crept into third place when a Jaguar in front of him swerved against an Alfa-Romeo, and the two cars roared into a plowed field. Raeder gunned for second place on the last three miles, but couldn't find passing room. An **S**-curve almost took him, but he fought the car back on the road, still holding third. Then the lead driver broke a crankshaft in the final fifty yards, and Jim ended in second place.

He was now a thousand dollars ahead. He received four fan letters,

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and a lady in Oshkosh sent him a pair of argyles. He was invited to appear on *Emergency*.

Unlike the others, *Emergency* was not a competition-type program. It stressed individual initiative. For the show, Raeder was knocked out with a non-habit-forming narcotic. He awoke in the cockpit of a small airplane, cruising on autopilot at ten thousand feet. His fuel gauge showed nearly empty. He had no parachute. He was supposed to land the plane.

Of course, he had never flown before.

He experimented gingerly with the controls, remembering that last week's participant had recovered consciousness in a submarine, had opened the wrong valve, and had drowned.

Thousands of viewers watched spellbound as this average man, a man just like themselves, struggled with the situation just as they would do. Jim Raeder was *them*. Anything he could do, they could do. He was representative of *the people*.

Raeder managed to bring the ship down in some semblance of a landing. He flipped over a few times, but his seat belt held. And the engine, contrary to expectation, did not burst into flames.

He staggered out with two broken ribs, three thousand dollars, and a chance, when he healed, to appear on *Torero*.

At last, a first-class thrill show! *Torero* paid ten thousand dollars. All you had to do was kill a black Miura bull with a sword, just like a real trained matador.

The fight was held in Madrid, since bullfighting was still illegal in the United States. It was nationally televised.

Raeder had a good cuadrilla. They liked the big, slow-moving American. The picadors really leaned into their lances, trying to slow the bull for him. The banderilleros tried to run the beast off his feet before driving in their banderillas. And the second matador, a mournful man from Algiceras, almost broke the bull's neck with fancy capework.

But when all was said and done it was Jim Raeder on the sand, a red muleta clumsily gripped in his left hand, a sword in his right, facing a ton of black, blood-streaked, wide-horned bull.

Someone was shouting, "Try for the lung, *hombre*. Don't be a hero, stick him in the lung." But Jim only knew what the technical adviser in New York had told him: Aim with the sword and go in over the horns.

Over he went. The sword bounced off bone, and the bull tossed him over its back. He stood up, miraculously ungouged, took another sword and went over the horns again with his eyes closed. The god who protects children and fools must have been watching, for the sword slid in like a needle

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through butter, and the bull looked startled, stared at him unbelievingly, and dropped like a deflated balloon.

They paid him ten thousand dollars, and his broken collar bone healed in practically no time. He received twenty-three fan letters, including a passionate invitation from a girl in Atlantic City, which he ignored. And they asked him if he wanted to appear on another show.

He had lost some of his innocence. He was now fully aware that he had been almost killed for pocket money. The big loot lay ahead. Now he wanted to be almost killed for something worthwhile.

So he appeared on *Underwater Perils,* sponsored by Fairlady's Soap. In face mask, respirator, weighted belt, flippers and knife, he slipped into the warm waters of the Caribbean with four other contestants, followed by a cage-protected camera crew. The idea was to locate and bring up a treasure which the sponsor had hidden there.

Mask diving isn't especially hazardous. But the sponsor had added some frills for public interest. The area was sown with giant clams, moray eels, sharks of several species, giant octopuses, poison coral, and other dangers of the deep.

It was a stirring contest. A man from Florida found the treasure in a deep crevice, but a moray eel found him. Another diver took the treasure, and a shark took him. The brilliant blue-green water became cloudy with blood, which photographed well on color TV. The treasure slipped to the bottom and Raeder plunged after it, popping an eardrum in the process. He plucked it from the coral, jettisoned his weighted belt and made for the surface. Thirty feet from the top he had to fight another diver for the treasure.

They feinted back and forth with their knives. The man struck, slashing Raeder across the chest. But Raeder, with the self-possession of an old contestant, dropped his knife and tore the man's respirator out of his mouth.

That did it. Raeder surfaced, and presented the treasure at the standby boat. It turned out to be a package of Fairlady's Soap—"The Greatest Treasure of All."

That netted him twenty-two thousand dollars in cash and prizes, and three hundred and eight fan letters, and an interesting proposition from a girl in Macon, which he seriously considered. He received free hospitalization for his knife slash and burst eardrum, and injections for coral infection.

But best of all, he was invited to appear on the biggest of the thrill shows. *The Prize of Peril.*

And that was when the real trouble began....

The subway came to a stop, jolting him out of his reverie. Raeder pushed back his hat and observed,

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across the aisle, a man staring at him and whispering to a stout woman. Had they recognized him?

He stood up as soon as the doors opened, and glanced at his watch. He had five hours to go.

At the Manhasset station he stepped into a taxi and told the driver to take him to New Salem.

"New Salem?" the driver asked, looking at him in the rear vision mirror.

"That's right."

The driver snapped on his radio. "Fare to New Salem. Yep, that's right. *New Salem.*"

They drove off. Raeder frowned, wondering if it had been a signal. It was perfectly usual for taxi drivers to report to their dispatchers, of course. But something about the man's voice...

"Let me off here," Raeder said.

He paid the driver and began walking down a narrow country road that curved through sparse woods. The trees were too small and too widely separated for shelter. Raeder walked on, looking for a place to hide.

There was a heavy truck approaching. He kept on walking, pulling his hat low on his forehead. But as the truck drew near, he heard a voice from the television set in his pocket. It cried, *"Watch out!"*

He flung himself into the ditch. The truck careened past, narrowly missing him, and screeched to a stop. The driver was shouting, "There he goes! Shoot, Harry, shoot!"

Bullets clipped leaves from the trees as Raeder sprinted into the woods.

"It's happened again!" Mike Terry was saying, his voice high-pitched with excitement. *"I'm afraid Jim Raeder let himself be lulled into a false sense of security. You can't do that, Jim! Not with your* life *at stake! Not with* killers *pursuing you! Be careful, Jim, you still have four and a half hours to go!"*

The driver was saying, "Claude, Harry, go around with the truck. We got him boxed."

"They've got you boxed, Jim Raeder!" Mike Terry cried. *"But they haven't got you yet! And you can thank Good Samaritan Susy Peters of twelve Elm Street, South Orange, New Jersey, for that warning shout just when the truck was bearing down on you. We'll have little Susy on stage in just a moment.... Look, folks, our studio helicopter has arrived on the scene. Now you can see Jim Raeder running, and the killers pursuing, surrounding him..."*

Raeder ran through a hundred yards of woods and found himself on a concrete highway, with open woods beyond. One of the killers was trotting through the woods behind him. The truck had driven to a connecting road, and was now a mile away, coming toward him.

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A car was approaching from the other direction. Raeder ran into the highway, waving frantically. The car came to a stop.

"Hurry!" cried the blond young woman driving it.

Raeder dived in. The woman made a U-turn on the highway. A bullet smashed through the windshield. She stamped on the accelerator, almost running down the lone killer who stood in the way.

The car surged away before the truck was within firing range.

Raeder leaned back and shut his eyes tightly. The woman concentrated on her driving, watching for the truck in her rear-vision mirror.

"It's happened again!" cried Mike Terry, his voice ecstatic. *"Jim Raeder has been plucked again from the jaws of death, thanks to Good Samaritan Janice Morrow of four three three Lexington Avenue, New York City. Did you ever see anything like it, folks? The way Miss Morrow drove through a fusillade of bullets and plucked Jim Raeder from the mouth of doom! Later we'll interview Miss Morrow and get her reactions. Now, while Jim Raeder speeds away—perhaps to safety, perhaps to further peril—we'll have a short announcement from our sponsor. Don't go away! Jim's got four hours and ten minutes until he's safe.* Anything *can happen!"*

"OK," the girl said. "We're off the air now. Raeder, what in the hell is the matter with you?"

"Eh?" Raeder asked. The girl was in her early twenties. She looked efficient, attractive, untouchable. Raeder noticed that she had good features, a trim figure. And he noticed that she seemed angry.

"Miss," he said, "I don't know how to thank you for—"

"Talk straight," Janice Morrow said. "I'm no Good Samaritan. I'm employed by the JBC network."

"So the program had me rescued!"

"Cleverly reasoned," she said.

"But why?"

"Look, this is an expensive show, Raeder. We have to turn in a good performance. If our rating slips, we'll all be in the street selling candy apples. And you aren't cooperating."

"What? Why?"

"Because you're terrible," the girl said bitterly. "You're a flop, a fiasco. Are you trying to commit suicide? Haven't you learned *anything* about survival?"

"I'm doing the best I can."

"The Thompsons could have had you a dozen times by now. We told them to take it easy, stretch it out. But it's like shooting a clay pigeon six feet tall. The Thompsons are cooperating, but they can only fake so far. If I hadn't come along, they'd have had to kill you—airtime or not."

Raeder stared at her, wondering how such a pretty girl could talk that way. She glanced at him, then quickly looked back to the road.

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"Don't give me that look!" she said. "*You* chose to risk your life for money, buster. And plenty of money! You knew the score. Don't act like some innocent little grocer who finds the nasty hoods are after him. That's a different plot."

"I know," Raeder said.

"If you can't live well, at least try to die well."

"You don't mean that," Raeder said.

"Don't be too sure.... You've got three hours and forty minutes until the end of the show. If you can stay alive, fine. The boodle's yours. But if you can't at least try to give them a run for the money."

Raeder nodded, staring intently at her.

"In a few moments we're back on the air. I develop engine trouble, let you off. The Thompsons go all out now. They kill you when and if they can, as soon as they can. Understand?"

"Yes," Raeder said. "If I make it, can I see you some time?"

She bit her lip angrily. "Are you trying to kid me?"

"No. I'd like to see you again. May I?"

She looked at him curiously. "I don't know. Forget it. We're almost on. I think your best bet is the woods to the right. Ready?"

"Yes. Where can I get in touch with you? Afterward, I mean."

"Oh, Raeder, you aren't paying attention. Go through the woods until you find a washed-out ravine. It isn't much, but it'll give you some cover."

"Where can I get in touch with you?" Raeder asked again.

"I'm in the Manhattan telephone book." She stopped the car. "OK, Raeder, start running."

He opened the door.

"Wait." She leaned over and kissed him on the lips. "Good luck, you idiot. Call me if you make it."

And then he was on foot, running into the woods.

He ran through birch and pine, past an occasional split-level house with staring faces at the big picture window. Some occupant of those houses must have called the gang, for they were close behind him when he reached the washed out little ravine. Those quiet, mannerly, law-abiding people didn't want him to escape, Raeder thought sadly. They wanted to see a killing. Or perhaps they wanted to see him *narrowly escape* a killing.

It came to the same thing, really.

He entered the ravine, burrowed into the thick underbrush and lay still. The Thompsons appeared on both ridges, moving slowly, watching for any movement. Raeder held his breath as they came parallel to him.

He heard the quick explosion of a revolver. But the killer had only shot a squirrel. It squirmed for a moment, then lay still.

Lying in the underbrush, Raeder heard the studio helicopter over-

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head. He wondered if any cameras were focused on him. It was possible. And if someone were watching, perhaps some Good Samaritan would help.

So looking upward, toward the helicopter, Raeder arranged his face in a reverent expression, clasped his hands and prayed. He prayed silently, for the audience didn't like religious ostentation. But his lips moved. That was every man's privilege.

And a real prayer was on his lips. Once, a lipreader in the audience had detected a fugitive *pretending* to pray, but actually just reciting multiplication tables. No help for that man!

Raeder finished his prayer. Glancing at his watch, he saw that he had nearly two hours to go.

And he didn't want to die! It wasn't worth it, no matter how much they paid! He must have been crazy, absolutely insane to agree to such a thing....

But he knew that wasn't true. And he remembered just how sane he had been.

One week ago he had been on the *Prize of Peril* stage, blinking in the spotlight, and Mike Terry had shaken his hand.

"Now Mr. Raeder," Terry had said solemnly, "do you understand the rules of the game you are about to play?"

Raeder nodded.

"If you accept, Jim Raeder, you will be a *hunted man* for a week. *Killers* will follow you, Jim. *Trained* killers, men wanted by the law for other crimes, granted immunity for this single killing under the Voluntary Suicide Act. They will be trying to kill *you,* Jim. Do you understand?"

"I understand," Raeder said. He also understood the two hundred thousand dollars he would receive if he could live out the week.

"I ask you again, Jim Raeder. We force no man to play for stakes of death."

"I want to play," Raeder said.

Mike Terry turned to the audience. "Ladies and gentlemen, I have here a copy of an exhaustive psychological test which an impartial psychological testing firm made on Jim Raeder at our request. Copies will be sent to anyone who desires them for twenty-five cents to cover the cost of mailing. The test shows that Jim Raeder is sane, well-balanced, and fully responsible in every way." He turned to Raeder. "Do you still want to enter the contest, Jim?"

"Yes, I do."

"Very well!" cried Mike Terry. "Jim Raeder, meet your would-be killers!"

The Thompson gang moved on stage, booed by the audience.

"Look at them, folks," said Mike Terry, with undisguised contempt. "Just look at them! Antisocial, thoroughly vicious, completely amoral. These men have no code but the

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criminal's warped code, no honor but the honor of the cowardly hired killer. They are doomed men, doomed by our society which will not sanction their activities for long, fated to an early and unglamorous death."

The audience shouted enthusiastically.

"What have you to say, Claude Thompson?" Terry asked.

Claude, the spokesman of the Thompsons, stepped up to the microphone. He was a thin, clean-shaven man, conservatively dressed.

"I figure," Claude Thompson said hoarsely, "I figure we're no worse than anybody. I mean, like soldiers in a war, *they* kill. And look at the graft in government, and the unions. Everybody's got their graft."

That was Thompson's tenuous code. But how quickly, with what precision Mike Terry destroyed the killer's rationalizations! Terry's questions pierced straight to the filthy soul of the man.

At the end of the interview Claude Thompson was perspiring, mopping his face with a silk handkerchief and casting quick glances at his men.

Mike Terry put a hand on Raeder's shoulder. "Here is the man who has agreed to become your victim—if you can catch him."

"We'll catch him," Thompson said, his confidence returning.

"Don't be too sure," said Terry. "Jim Raeder has fought wild bulls—now he battles jackals. He's an average man. He's *the people*—who mean ultimate doom to you and your kind."

"We'll get him," Thompson said.

"And one thing more," Terry said, very softly. "Jim Raeder does not stand alone. The folks of America are for him. Good Samaritans from all corners of our great nation stand ready to assist him. Unarmed, defenceless, Jim Raeder can count on the aid and goodheartedness of *the people,* whose representative he is. So don't be too sure, Claude Thompson! The average men are for Jim Raeder—and there are a lot of average men!"

Raeder thought about it, lying motionless in the underbrush. Yes, *the people* had helped him. But they had helped the killers, too.

A tremor ran through him. He had chosen, he reminded himself. He alone was responsible. The psychological test had proved that.

And yet, how responsible were the psychologists who had given him the test? How responsible was Mike Terry for offering a poor man so much money? Society had woven the noose and put it around his neck, and he was hanging himself with it, and calling it free will.

Whose fault?

"Aha!" someone cried.

Raeder looked up and saw a portly man standing near him. The

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man wore a loud tweed jacket. He had binoculars around his neck, and a cane in his hand.

"Mister," Raeder whispered, "please don't tell—"

"Hi!" shouted the portly man, pointing at Raeder with his cane. "Here he is!"

A madman, thought Raeder. The damned fool must think he's playing Hare and Hounds.

"Right over here!" the man screamed.

Cursing, Raeder sprang to his feet and began running. He came out of the ravine and saw a white building in the distance. He turned toward it. Behind him he could still hear the man.

"That way, over there. Look, you fools, can't you see him yet?"

The killers were shooting again. Raeder ran, stumbling over uneven ground, past three children playing in a tree house.

"Here he is!" the children screamed. "Here he is!"

Raeder groaned and ran on. He reached the steps of the building, and saw that it was a church.

As he opened the door, a bullet struck him behind the right kneecap.

He fell, and crawled inside the church.

The television set in his pocket was saying, *"What a finish, folks, what a finish! Raeder's been hit! He's been hit, folks, he's crawling now, he's in pain, but he hasn't given up! Not Jim Raeder!"*

Raeder lay in the aisle near the altar. He could hear a child's eager voice saying, "He went in there, Mr. Thompson. Hurry, you can still catch him!"

Wasn't a church considered a sanctuary, Raeder wondered.

Then the door was flung open, and Raeder realized that the custom was no longer observed. He gathered himself together and crawled past the altar, out the back door of the church.

He was in an old graveyard. He crawled past crosses and stars, past slabs of marble and granite, past stone tombs and rude wooden markers. A bullet exploded on a tombstone near his head, showering him with fragments. He crawled to the edge of an open grave.

They had received him, he thought. All of those nice average normal people. Hadn't they said he was their representative? Hadn't they sworn to protect their own? But no, they loathed him. Why hadn't he seen it? Their hero was the cold, blank-eyed gunman, Thompson, Capone, Billy the Kid, Young Lochinvar, El Cid, Cuchulain, the man without human hopes or fears. They worshiped him, that dead, implacable robot gunman, and lusted to feel his foot in their face.

Raeder tried to move, and slid helplessly into the open grave.

He lay on his back, looking at the blue sky. Presently a black sil-

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houette loomed above him, blotting out the sky. Metal twinkled. The silhouette slowly took aim.

And Raeder gave up all hope forever.

"WAIT, THOMPSON!" roared the amplified voice of Mike Terry.

The revolver wavered.

"It is one second past five o'clock! The week is up! JIM RAEDER HAS WON!"

There was a pandemonium of cheering from the studio audience.

The Thompson gang, gathered around the grave, looked sullen.

"He's won, friends, he's won!" Mike Terry cried. *"Look, look on your screen! The police have arrived, they're taking the Thompsons away from their victim—the victim they could not kill. And all this is thanks to* you, *Good Samaritans of America. Look folks, tender hands are lifting Jim Raeder from the open grave that was his final refuge. Good Samaritan Janice Morrow is there. Could this be the beginning of a romance? Jim seems to have fainted, friends, they're giving him a stimulant. He's won two hundred thousand dollars! Now we'll have a few words from Jim Raeder!"*

There was a short silence.

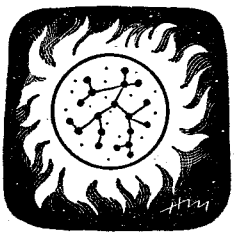
"That's odd," said Mike Terry. *"Folks, I'm afraid we can't hear from Jim just now. The doctors are examining him. Just one moment..."*

There was a silence. Mike Terry wiped his forehead and smiled.

"It's the strain, folks, the terrible strain. The doctor tells me... Well, folks, Jim Raeder is temporarily not himself. But it's only temporary! JBC is hiring the best psychiatrists and psychoanalysts in the country. We're going to do everything humanly possible for this gallant boy. And entirely at our own expense."

Mike Terry glanced at the studio clock. *"Well, it's about time to sign off, folks. Watch for the announcement of our next great thrill show. And don't worry, I'm sure that very soon we'll have Jim Raeder back with us."*

Mike Terry smiled, and winked at the audience. *"He's bound to get well, friends. After all, we're all pulling for him!"*



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Remember Threesie *(F&SF, January, 1956)? Or* Impact with the Devil *(November, 1956)? If so you'll recall Ted Cogswell as a particularly ingenious expert at twisting the tail of a standard fantasy theme by revealing unexpected, yet wholly logical implications. The device which he brightly rearranges this time is that of the mysterious small shop which sells strange and unaccountable things . . . and sometimes even*

Things

by THEODORE R. COGSWELL

". . . and the ground was frozen solid. It took them two hours before they reached Hawkins' coffin.

"'See,' grunted the coroner as he threw back the lid, 'he's still there. I told you you were seeing things.'

"'I've got to be sure,' said Van Dusen thickly, and grabbing a smoking lantern from beside the grave, he thrust it down into the open casket.

"A shrill scream tore through the night air and he slumped over—dead! Instead of the heavy features of the man he had killed, Reginald Van Dusen saw HIMSELF!"

There was a sudden ripple of discordant music from the loudspeaker and then the unctuous voice of The Ghoul broke in.

"The coroner called it suicide. And in a way I suppose it was . . ." His voice trailed off in a throaty chuckle. *"The moral? Only this, dear friends, if you should ever be walking through a strange part of town and come upon a little shop you never saw before, especially a little shop with a sign in the window that says* SHOTTLE BOP, WE SELL THRINGS, *or something equally ridiculous, remember* THE CASE OF THE CLUTTERED COFFIN *and run, don't walk, to the nearest morgue. HA HA HA HA HA."*

As the maniacal laughter trailed away, the background music surged up and then skittered out of hearing to make way for the announcer. He only managed to get three words out before Albert Blotz, owner, manager, and sole agent of World Wide Investigations, reached over and turned off the little radio that stood on the window sill beside his desk.

"Boy," he said, "that was really something. Eh, Janie?"

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The little crippled girl behind the typist's desk at the other side of the dingy office looked up.

"What?"

"The program. Wasn't it something?"

"Beats me," she said. "I wasn't listening. Somebody has to get some work done around here." She pulled a letter out of her correspondence basket and waved it in the air. "What about this Harris letter? It's been sitting here for a month. After spending the guy's dough the least you can do is write him an answer."

The fat man looked blank. "Harris? Who's he?"

"The fellow in Denver who wanted you to investigate everybody in New York who had had a big and unexpected windfall within the past year."

Blotz snorted impatiently. "That nut! Aw, tell him anything."

"Give me a for-instance."

"Tell him . . ." Blotz leaned heavily back in his chair and stared at the ceiling. "Tell him that World Wide Investigations assigned its best operatives to the case and that in sixteen cases out of twenty... No, better make it twenty-nine out of thirty-four. That way he'll really feel he's getting his money's worth."

"All right, in twenty-nine out of thirty-four cases what?"

"Don't rush me." Blotz pulled a bottle of cheap blend out of his drawer and eyed the remaining inch regretfully.

"You know the doctor said your heart wouldn't take much more of that."

The fat man shrugged and tossed the liquor down. As his eyes wandered around the office in search of inspiration, they came to rest on the radio.

"That's it!" he exclaimed.

"What's it?"

"The Ghoul! For once crime pays somebody but the actors and the script writers. Tell Harris that in whatever it was out of whatever it was cases, the individuals concerned visited small shops they had never noticed before and were sold objects whose nature they refused to reveal by a strange old man."

Janie looked up from her shorthand pad. "Is that all?"

"No, we need a clincher." He thought for a minute. "How's this? In each case when they went back and tried to find the shop it had disappeared."

"You ought to try writing radio scripts yourself."

"Too much work," said Blotz. "I like the mail order detective business better." He looked regretfully at the empty bottle and then back at Janie. "While you're at it you might as well tell that yokel that for five bills World Wide will find the shop for him and buy him one of those dingbats."

Janie's lips tightened. "Doesn't your conscience ever bother you?"

Blotz let out a nasty laugh. "If it weren't for the suckers I'd have

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to work for a living. This way it's a breeze. Some old dame in Podunk hasn't heard from her kid since he took off for the big city and gets worried about him. He doesn't answer her letters and then one day she sees my ad in the Podunk *Gazette* and sends me fifty bucks to go look for him. How come you asked?"

"Because mine bothers me. Every day I work here I feel dirtier."

Blotz grinned. "Then quit."

"I've been thinking of that. At least I'd be able to sleep nights."

"But you wouldn't be eating so regular. Face it, kid—nobody is going to hire a gimpy sparrow like you unless he's a big-hearted guy like me. And there ain't many around."

Janie looked from him to the pair of worn crutches that leaned against the wall.

"Yeah," she said as she started punching out the letter to Harris. "Yeah, there sure ain't."

Mr. Blotz's pulse was finally back to normal but he still couldn't tear his eyes away from the crisp green slip of paper that bore the magic figures $500.00 and the name of a Denver bank.

"He bit," he said in an awed voice. "He really bit. May wonders, and suckers, never cease." He rubbed his fat hands together nervously. "I'd better get this to the bank and cash it before something happens."

Half an hour later he was back, carefully stacking bottles of bonded bourbon into his desk drawers. When they were arranged to his satisfaction, he leaned back and hoisted his feet on the desk.

"Take a letter to Harris."

Janie obediently took out her shorthand pad.

"Usual heading. Eh . . . oh, something like this. *'Pursuant to your instructions, my agents in all the major cities have been instructed to check for little shops they don't remember having seen before. They are to be especially alert for basement stores with dusty signs in the window with wordings like* WE SELL THRINGS *or* SHOTTLE BOP. *Upon discovery they are to enter immediately. If a small aged man appears from the rear of the shop and presses them to buy something, they are to do so. Once they leave they are to make careful note of the shop's location and walk around the block. If when they return the shop has disappeared, they are immediately to send their purchase to you.'"*

Blotz paused, took a bottle out of his drawer, and uncapped it. "Put something in about unexpectedly heavy expenses at the end. If we play this right we may be able to tap him again. In the meantime we'd better have something ready to send him just in case."

"What kind of a something?" asked Janie.

"Who cares? Go over on Third

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and prowl some of those junk shops. Pick up something small—that'll keep the postage down—and old."

The little secretary pulled herself painfully to her feet, draped a threadbare coat over her humped back, and took her crutches from beside her typing desk.

"Just don't go over a dollar," added Blotz quickly.

She started toward the door and then turned and stood blinking at him through thick lensed glasses that made her eyes appear twice their normal size.

"Well?" he barked.

"I haven't got a dollar."

With a pained expression on his face he fumbled in an old coin purse. He reluctantly pulled out a quarter, then another, and then finally another.

"Here," he said, "see what you can do for seventy-five cents."

Blotz was deep in his bottle when Janie finally came hobbling back and placed a small paper-wrapped package on his desk.

"Any change?" he asked.

She shook her head. "It was funny," she ventured. "I mean after what you said about shottles and thrings—"

"Well, open it up," he interrupted. "Let's see what Harris is getting for his money."

"—all this shop had in front," she went on hesitantly, "was just one sign. It said: THIMGS."

"Poor bastard that owns it, I guess. Some people have funny names," said Blotz. "Go on—open it."

With fingers that trembled slightly she tore off the brown paper wrapping. Inside was a small corroded brass cylinder that on first glance looked like an old plumbing fixture.

"You paid seventy-five cents for that?" said Blotz in annoyance. "They saw you coming, kid." He picked it up and turned it over in his hand. On second look he realized that there was more to it than he had first thought. Through the heavy green patina he could make out a series of strange characters. At one end was a knob that seemed to be made out of a slightly different metal than the cylinder proper.

"I give up, what is it?" he asked. Janie shuddered. "I wish I knew," she said. "I wish I knew."

Blotz frowned and took hold of the knob. He was about to twist it when a sudden thought occurred to him. It might explode or do something equally unpleasant.

"Here, you try it," he said to Janie. "It seems to be stuck."

She reached out a trembling hand and then jerked it back. "I'm afraid. The man in the shop said —"

"Take it!" he barked. "When I tell you to do something, you do it. And no back talk!"

In frightened obedience she took

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the cylinder and twisted the knob. For a moment nothing happened, and then with an odd flickering she vanished. Before Blotz had a chance to react properly to the sudden emptiness of the office, she was back. At least a not very reasonable facsimile was.

She might have passed for her sister, there was a strong family resemblance, but the pathetic twist in her spine was gone and so was its accompanying hump. She was thirty pounds heavier, and all the pounds were in the right places. She was—and the realization hit Blotz like a hammer blow as he stood gaping at her—one of the most beautiful things he had ever seen.

The first thing she did was to pull off her thick-lensed glasses and throw them in the wastebasket. The first thing Blotz did was to grab a bottle out of his desk. He took several long gulps, shook his head, and shuddered.

"It's when you're half drunk that things get twisty," he mumbled. "I'm just going to sit here with my eyes shut until I'm drunk enough to get back to normal." He counted to twenty slowly as the fireball in his stomach expanded and trickled a semi-sense of well-being through his extremities. Then, as the nightmare slowly dispelled, he let out a long sigh of relief and opened his eyes.

She was still there!

There was a strange smile on her face that he didn't like.

"Where...? What...?" Blotz's vocal chords stopped operating and he just sat there and quivered. She laid the little bronze cylinder down on the desk in front of him.

"Here," she said softly. "You can go there too if you want to."

"Where?" whispered Blotz.

"I don't know. It's someplace else, a tremendous place with rooms filled with whirring machines. There was a man there and he asked what I wanted and I told him. So he did a little reediting and here I am."

"Magic," said Blotz hoarsely. "Black magic, that's what it is. But..." His voice trailed off.

"But you don't believe in magic." Is that what you were going to say?" She didn't wait for an answer. "But I do. People like me have to. It's the only way we can keep going. But magic has a funny way of working. Do you know what I was thinking after the little man asked me what I wanted?"

Blotz moistened his thick lips and shook his head as if hypnotized.

"I was thinking that in spite of the way things look, there's just one thing you can always count on."

"Yeah?"

"People always end up getting what they got coming."

Blotz let out a half hysterical laugh. "Then where's mine? Why does a guy with my brains have to scrabble out a living with a two-bit

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outfit like this?" He raved on for a minute and then got control of himself. The liquor helped. After he'd taken a couple more gulps from his bottle he still couldn't look what had happened squarely in the face, but with the abatement of the first shock came a gradual return of the old sense of mastery that had made him hire Janie rather than some less experienced but more feminine—and amiable—typist.

As an awareness of the physical changes that had taken place began to grow, he found his eyes sliding greedily over her. The change hadn't extended her dress. The garment that had been more than adequate covering for the twisted and scrawny little body she had occupied up until a few minutes before threatened to split at the thrusting of the rich new curves that strained against it.

"You know, Janie," he said slowly, "seeing as it was my money that got you what you got, that kind of makes me the copyright owner." Grabbing hold of the edge of his desk, he pulled himself to his feet and lurched toward her. When he put one flabby arm around her, she didn't pull away. Emboldened, he let his hand slip down and begin to fumble with the buttons on her blouse.

"I wouldn't do that if I were you," she said in a strange voice.

"But you ain't me. That's what makes it so nice for both of us."

His fumbling fingers had managed to unfasten the first button and his thick lips began to march like twin slugs over the soft curve of her shoulder.

She acted as if he were still on the other side of the room.

"It took more courage than I thought I had in me but I asked him to give me just what I deserved."

"Him? Oh, yeah. Well that's me, baby," said Blotz thickly as he went to work on the second button.

"You could have been," she said in the same distant voice. "That was the chance I was taking."

The second button was obstinate. Blotz gave an impatient yank that caused the worn fabric to rip in his hands. As if aware of them for the first time, she shrugged herself free. As Blotz grunted and grabbed for her, he felt a sudden wrenching, stabbing pain lance through his chest, and then with no transition at all he found himself falling. He slumped against the desk, and as his plump fingers scrabbled against the smooth surface, trying to secure a hold that would keep him from plummeting down into darkness, they touched the worn bronze cylinder. As he slid on down, face purple and eyeballs bulging, more through instinct than conscious volition he found and twisted the serrated knob at one end. There was an immediate release, a translation in-

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to someplace else. He was standing again and the pain was gone, but except for a tiny glowing spot in front of him, it was darker than he had ever known before.

"Janie," he whimpered. "Janie."

His voice echoed metallically from distant walls. He turned to run but there was no place to run to, only the darkness. He had a sudden vision of unseen pits and crevasses, and froze where he stood. And then, unable to stand his own immobility, he inched cautiously toward the tiny spot of light, testing the whatever-it-was under his feet with each sliding step.

At last he was able to touch it, a cold luminous circle set in a smooth steel wall at chest height. As he moved his arm toward it, the hand that still held the bronze cylinder jerked forward of its own volition, pulling his arm with it, and plunged into the glowing circle. There was a clicking of relays and then glaring overhead lights went on.

He had been wise to check his footing. He was standing on a catwalk that arched dizzily over a several-acre expanse of strange whirring machinery. There were no guard rails, only a narrow tongue of metal that stretched out from some spot lost in the murky distance until it reached the smooth metal wall before which he stood. Then with a whining sound, a door opened in front of him. An invisible force pushed him through and he found himself in a great vault-like room whose walls were covered with countless tiny winking lights and bank upon bank of intricate controls. As the door clanged shut behind him, a little ball of shimmering light bounced across the floor toward him, expanded, wavered, and then suddenly took the shape of a harassed-faced little man with burning, deep-set eyes and a long white beard.

"Well," he said impatiently, "out with it!"

Blotz didn't say anything for a minute. He couldn't. When he finally got partial control of his vocal chords all that came out was an almost incoherent series of *who's, what's* and *how's*. The little man interrupted him with an impatient gesture.

"Stop sputtering," he said testily. "I'm tired of sputtering. This may be new to you but it isn't to me. You're the four-hundred and-thirty-six-thousand-three-hundred-and-fifty-ninth mortal to get hold of one of the keys, and you're also the four-hundred-and-thirty-six-thousand-three-hundred-and-fifty-ninth sputterer. Damn the M.W. boys, anyway!"

"M.W.?" Blotz was sparring for enough time to get his own thinking organized. What steadied him was the thought that, fantastic as all this was, Janie had been here before him. And Janie had somehow managed to snag herself a jackpot. His first job was to find

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out enough about the situation to angle it around to his own advantage.

"Mysterious Ways. It's a special department in the home office that specializes in making life more complicated for the Guardians. I'm a Guardian," the little man added gloomily.

"After Reward and Punishment switched their records section over to completely automatic operation, somebody in M.W. came up with the bright idea that humans should still have some sort of a chance for personal attention. So they made up a few widgets like the one you got hold of and scattered them around at random." He gave a dry cough. "Not that you've got much when you do get hold of one. All that comes with it is the right to a little personal re-editing of your future—and even that is controlled by the Prime Directive."

Blotz's eyes narrowed slightly. So he had a right to something. He had something coming that they had to give him. He thought of Janie's sudden metamorphosis and he licked his thick lips.

"The girl that was here before me," he asked eagerly. "Is what happened to her what you call re-editing?"

The little man nodded.

"And I got a right to the same? I mean, you can make me look the way I'd like to instead of the way I do?"

There was another nod. "But—"

"No *but's,*" interrupted Blotz rudely. "I want what I got a right to. You get to work on that tape of mine and fix it so I'll have as much on the ball on the male side as Janie has on the female. And toss in a nice fat bankroll while you're at it. Me, I like to travel first class." He thought for a moment and then held up a restraining hand. "But don't start tinkering until I give you the word. It ain't every day that a guy gets a chance to rebuild himself from the ground up, and I want to be sure that I get all the little details just right."

"But," continued the Guardian as if the interruption had never occurred, "re-editing in your case wouldn't have much point. The heart attack you were having just before the key brought you here was a signal, a warning that the tape which has been recording the significant events of your life has just about reached its end. A few minutes after you return, the automatic rewind will cut in and then your spool will be removed from the recorder and sent over to Reward and Punishment for processing."

Blotz had always considered himself an atheist—more in self-defense than anything else. The thought of a superior something someplace taking personal note of each of his antisocial actions for purposes of future judgment was one that he had never cared to contemplate. He much preferred the feeling of im-

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munity that came with the belief that man is simply an electrochemical machine that returns to its original components when it finally wears out.

But now! The little man's casual reference to something coming after was disturbing enough to almost override the shock caused by the announcement of his imminent death.

"What's processing?" he asked uneasily. "What are they going to do to me?"

Instead of answering, the Guardian walked over to a control panel and punched a series of buttons. A moment later a large screen over his head lit up.

"The playback starts here."

The screen flickered and then steadied to show a hospital delivery room and a writhing woman strapped to a table.

"What's all this got to do with me?"

"R&R have to start their processing someplace. In your case I imagine some special arrangements have been made."

They had been. When Blotz started making little mewling noises, the little man reached forward and turned a knob. The screen went dark.

"Had enough?" he asked.

"Yeah," said the other thickly, "but I got to know." He shuddered. "Go ahead and hit the high spots. Nothing could be worse than what I just saw."

The Guardian did. There were things that could be worse. Much worse.

"Why?" whispered Blotz when it was finally over. "Why?"

"Because the ethical universe is just as orderly as the physical one. For each action there is an equal and contrary—though delayed—reaction."

Blotz fought frantically against the hysteria that threatened to engulf him. Always in the past there had been something that could be twisted to his advantage. The present had to be the same. There had to be an angle here. There had to be! Desperately he ran over the events of the past quarter hour, trying to find something that didn't fit the pattern as the little man had presented it.

The re-editing! There had to be something in the re-editing!

"Look," he stammered. "You *can* change things. You did for Janie. Why can't you go back over my tape and take out all the really bad things?"

"Because the past can't be changed," said the little man impatiently. "The re-editing that you have a right to applies only to the future. And as I've already pointed out, yours is so limited that any adjustment I might make would have very little meaning."

Blotz took a deep breath and held it. He couldn't afford to panic. Not now. But where was the angle? Given that the past couldn't

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be changed. Given that once he returned to Earth he had only a half a minute of life left. What then? How could a tape be kept from ending?

Say he'd bugged a bedroom to collect evidence for a divorce case and say he didn't want to miss recording a single squeak. Maybe if he . . .

Of course!

"I've got a little job for you," he said in a voice that quivered slightly in spite of his best efforts to control it. "I want you to do some splicing."

The little man looked at him in obvious bewilderment.

"Splicing?"

Blotz was still shaky but he was beginning to enjoy himself. "That's what I said. It just occurred to me that if you spliced a second tape on to the end of the one that's just about finished, I could keep on living." He gestured toward the blank screen. "And after your little preview, keeping on living is what I want most to do. The splicing, it can be done, can't it?"

It was the Guardian's turn to sputter.

"Can? Of course it can. But I'm not about to," he added angrily. "To begin with, your old body's worn out and I'd have to hunt you up a new one."

"So what? The thing I want to hang on to is the *me,* the part that does the feeling and thinking, the part that *knows.*" A snarl came into his voice. "And don't tell me you won't. You've got to!" He waved the bronze cylinder under the little man's nose. "I came up with the brass ring, Buster, and I got a free ride coming."

He stopped suddenly and a look of awe came over his face. "*A* free ride? And why only one when I can keep on swapping horses?" He laughed exultantly. "Why, if you keep on splicing? Listen, here's the word. Every time the tape that's running through the recorder is about to reach its end, I want a new one patched on. And make sure that each body I get is well-heeled, healthy and handsome. Like I said before, I like to travel first class."

The little man seemed on the verge of tears. "It's not a good idea," he said. "It's not a good idea at all. I can barely keep up with my work as it is, and if I have to —"

"But you do have to," said Blotz viciously. "Whether you like it or not, I've just beat the system. Me, little Al Blotz, the guy that used to have to work penny-ante swindles just to keep eating. But no more. What was chalked up against me before is peanuts compared to what's coming. And you know why? Because Reward and Punishment can't process me until my tape comes to an end. And it ain't ever. Never!"

"But—"

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"Get going!"

The Guardian threw up his hands in defeat. "It's going to make a lot of extra work for me," he said mournfully, "but if you in—"

"Sure I insist," said Blotz, holding resolutely onto the cylinder. "You can tell Reward and Punishment to go process itself. I got it made."

The little machine that kept track of Mr. Blotz's actions hesitated momentarily when it came to the splice, and then gave a loud click and began to record on the new section of tape.

CLICK!

He woke to something heavy pressing on his chest and an angry buzzing. Blotz—no longer Blotz as far as externals went—opened sleepy eyes and blinked up at the ugly wedge-shaped head that was reared back ready to strike.

"Why didn't you tell me you were expecting company, Carl?" There was a note of savage enjoyment in the soft voice from the other side of the campfire.

Blotz wanted to beg, to plead with the other to save him, but he didn't dare risk the slightest lip movement. The snake was angry. One little motion and it would strike.

"I was going to kill you, Carl," the quiet voice went on. "I was going to damn my immortal soul to save the world from you. But now I don't have to. I'm just a spectator. Sometime before too long you're going to have to move. When you do it will be horrible, but it won't last more than a few hours. That's more than you granted the others. Remember my sister, Carl? And how long it took?"

The involuntary movement that was the prelude to agony was accompanied by a momentary feeling of relief. At least before too long it would be over. But with the final convulsion there came a

CLICK!

He was strangling. With a convulsive kick he brought himself to the surface and spat out a mouthful of blood-tinged salt water. To his left small bits of debris bobbed up and down in the oil slick that marked the spot where his cabin cruiser had gone down. He paddled in an aimless circle, unable to strike out because of the splintered rib that lanced into one lung. Almost an hour passed before the first black dorsal fin came circling curiously in.

The Guardian yawned as he looked around for another bit of tape to splice on to the one that was almost finished. Young, healthy, handsome—there were enough odd ends around so that Blotz would never have to worry about dying, never in a million years.

Not dying, that was something else.

CLICK!

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All I've been able to learn about John Shepley is that he was born in 1925 in Minnesota, was once a silk-screen artist in New York, and is now a writer in Rome; that his work has appeared in various "little magazines" and in Martha Foley's THE BEST AMERICAN SHORT STORIES: 1956; *and that this is his first published fantasy. Delightful in both its thinking and its writing, this hitherto unchronicled episode in the career of the great Toto should make you, like me, hungry for more Shepley soon.*

Gorilla Suit

by JOHN SHEPLEY

MAN WITH GORILLA SUIT or gorilla to help publicize newest Bing Crosby—Bob Hope—Dorothy Lamour Technicolor comedy "Road to Bali." 1 day's employment. Apply Bali-Bally Dept, Paramount Pictures, 11th floor, 1501 Broadway, Monday AM.

—Classified Advertisement in the New York Times Sunday, January 25, 1953.

Toto judged it a very dull issue of the Sunday *Times*. He had read the theater section, admitting himself reluctantly in agreement with the critics: Broadway was having another disappointing season. He had not been impressed by any of the book reviews; the news was the usual alternating succession of horrors and trivia; the articles in the magazine section had left him cold. Finally, glumly, he had begun the crossword puzzle, much to the amusement of the crowd on the other side of the bars. They always distracted and irritated him particularly, these familial Sunday crowds, the mournful dutiful fathers, the stout women in hats, the noisy children with candy-smeared faces and sticky pointing fingers, but nevertheless he had become fairly absorbed . . . until he came to 143 Across: *"U. S. experimental $4 gold pieces, 1879-80."* A seven-letter word, the sixth "A." But who but a financial historian could be expected to know what it was? Specialization was creeping even into the simplest Sunday pastimes—it was unfair. Standing to the front of the crowd and holding the string

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of a pink balloon was a kind-looking lady with dim blue eyes. Perhaps *she* was a financial historian —Toto earnestly approached her. She shrieked, letting go of the balloon, and as it floated upwards, the children twittered in chorus and some cried. Toto gave up, threw down pencil and puzzle, and took refuge on the topmost perch of the cage, where he clung sulkily until the crowd, bored by his inactivity, moved away. Then he dropped back to the floor, and, consumed by a sense of futility, began leafing through the Classified Advertisements.

And there he came across it. Incredulous, he blinked his eyes, scratched his head and sides, read it through a second, then a third, time... but no, it was no mistake: there in cold print was a job opening for a man with a gorilla suit *or a gorilla* to help publicize Dorothy Lamour's latest picture. Toto pulled himself up, reflecting that he didn't need a job, that in a sense he had one already, but the implications contained in the little boxed announcement would not be silenced, the fun it would be, the glory (he might even be photographed with Dorothy Lamour!), though only for one day. He found himself skipping and swinging all over the cage.

But when, with a certain critical caution, he returned to peruse the ad for a fourth time, subtle qualms began to arise in his mind. Perhaps what they wanted was a man with a gorilla suit or *a man with* a gorilla—in which case, there was no point in *his* applying. It was really rather obscure, just what they thought they wanted, and Toto, trying to figure it out, scratched himself for a long time. Yet, if the idea was to have a gorilla, simulated or otherwise, why shouldn't one apply? And indeed, there was a simple solution: if they insisted that the gorilla be humanly escorted, why not show the ad to his keeper, Mr. McCready, while pointing with especial emphasis to *"11th floor, 1501 Broadway, Monday AM"*?

But no, that wouldn't do, he immediately recognized the impracticality of it. It wasn't that Mr. McCready would refuse — he wouldn't—but he wouldn't agree either. He would be doubtful; he would give a pompous little laugh, a nervous cough; he would look puzzled and hurt; until Toto, feeling guilty, would withdraw his request altogether. Or, on the offchance that Mr. McCready did agree, it would be only with the understanding that he must first ask the directors, and he would so procrastinate in doing so that (even assuming that the directors ultimately gave their approval) it would then be too late to apply for the job. Someone else would already have enjoyed the brief, glorious limelight with Dorothy Lamour. No, the only thing to do,

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Toto decided, was to present Mr. McCready and the zoo authorities with a *fait accompli.*

He could hardly wait for closing time, when the visitors would vanish and the doors be locked, so that he might have a little quiet in which to think out a plan. Surely, he reasoned, as he watched the attendants sweeping up the trash left by the departed crowd, surely he would be hired in preference to any man dressed up like a gorilla. It shouldn't be difficult to beat out *that* kind of competition. But suppose *other gorillas* applied, ones with previous experience in the theater or public relations? This prospect so frightened him that he decided to abandon the whole idea. He curled himself up in a fetid darkness, sadly caressing his toes and listening to familiar noises, metal somewhere scraping against cement, mechanical rumblings in an underground distance, the nightly asthmatic wheezing of his neighbor, an old prowling mandrill. Toto closed his eyes, covered his ears, went on arguing to himself . . . what was there to lose? Nothing, really. It wasn't even as though he were risking anything, for the worst that could happen was that he simply wouldn't get the job. All the same, it wouldn't be easy to get out of the cage.

Nothing ventured, nothing gained. It was tiresome having to bolster oneself with truisms—still, cheerfully enough, he set about testing the bars, one by one. He went all over the cage, without finding a single loose bar. He groaned, realizing how much time he had already wasted, for not only must he be out of the cage and away from the zoo before Mr. McCready arrived in the morning, but he must be at 1501 Broadway in time to be among the first on line. Now, painfully, he tried to squeeze himself between the bars, aware that the mandrill had stopped his prowling, was crouching there on his haunches, his eyes a phosphorescent green, watching it all with the bemused curiosity of the senile. Toto went on pushing and lunging, but all he succeeded in doing was to scrape some patches of fur from his forearms and sides. And it was so important to look his best!

It was useless, the space between the bars was too small. In a final, despairing, almost whimsical gesture, he tried the door—it opened easily. But that showed that they *trusted* him! Astonished, he could only stand there holding the catch of the door, wondering if it would not be ungrateful to take advantage of such trust. Ah, but if he got the job, how proud Mr. McCready would be! Or would he? Toto wavered . . . the mandrill resumed wheezing . . . familiar sounds. And then he heard an unfamiliar sound, a rustling of jungle leaves, and the bright image of Dorothy Lamour stepped out into the sunlight. Toto

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leapt confidently out of the cage.

But he had forgotten that the door of the building itself would be locked. He kicked it, pulled it, beat on it with his fists, which only awoke the spider monkeys, spiteful little creatures who tumbled and gibbered and pointed their fingers at him. Then the most fearful racket broke out—the chimpanzees woke up and began screaming, a chorus of baboons howled, even the mandrill joined in. "*What's going on in there?*"—and the door opened, pressing Toto behind it, as the night guard came in, cursing softly and flashing his light about the cages. Everybody, blinking, became silent, and Toto had just enough time to slip around the door and hide himself behind a low cement wall before the guard re-emerged and turned the lock. Toto held his breath, but the guard merely went away whistling, swinging his extinguished light.

He rested, until the pounding of his heart subsided and the guard was out of sight. Then, happily, cutting a little caper, he set out across the park.

It was quarter to nine when he took the elevator to the eleventh floor at 1501 Broadway. Again he was feeling worried and uncomfortable. For one thing, he was hungry, and he was afraid he had caught cold during two hours of furtive slumber in some bushes near the skating rink. And all the way from the park, down Broadway to 44th Street, he had reproached himself for forgetting to bring along the Classified Advertisements Section of the *Times*. It would have been most helpful in explaining his presence on the streets had a policeman or anyone else stopped him. But fortunately no one had stopped him. The people in the street had all passed him by with Monday-morning expressions on their faces.

In the crowded elevator, he tried to spruce himself up, brushing from his shoulders and legs the bits of dried grass that clung there from his sleeping in the park. But a murmur of protest arose—"Hey, quit y'r shovin', Mac," said a man on his right, who, Toto suddenly saw, had a rolled-up gorilla suit under his arm. He resigned himself to standing quietly, fervently hoping that he had got rid of most of the grass.

The elevator emptied itself at the eleventh floor, they all streamed out together, and to Toto's amazement, each of his fellow passengers was carrying a gorilla suit—some in a neat bundle with the jaws gaping out from under the owner's arm, some draped across human shoulders with a gorilla head bobbing along ludicrously a few inches from the floor, some apparent only by the patches of fur sticking out from the apertures of shabby cardboard suitcases or corrugated boxes. He had not expected so much com-

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petition, but there was at least one cause for relief—neither getting out of the elevator nor in the crowd already waiting at the door of the Bali-Bally Department was there a single other real gorilla. He joined the increasing throng milling about the unopened office.

Although he knew it was not quite fair to do so, he could not help feeling a little contemptuous. Not only were they not gorillas, they were a sorry lot of men—wan, and thin, and old. He overheard a bit of conversation, one man saying to another, "Hey, I seen you before! Wasn't you a Santa Claus in Herald Square last Christmas?"

"Yeah. But I don't remember seein' you."

"I was there awright, Mac, you shoulda looked. I tried to get into Macy's, Gimbel's, anyplace warm, but the best I could get was one of them street jobs. It's a tough racket."

"Sure is," the other agreed. "I got an Easter Bunny job lined up maybe, but I don't know what I'll do till then if I don't get this thing." And he patted his gorilla suit, while the first man eyed him jealously. "Even if it *is* just one day."

And now Toto began to feel sorry for them, wondering if it was not grasping and presumptuous of him to be there at all. He, for whom food and shelter had been generously provided, who had even a recognized social function, had descended to trying to take work away from individuals who really needed it. Perhaps he should turn back... but at that point the elevator opened again, another mob of men with gorilla suits poured out, and they were followed by a young woman, who, after fumbling in her purse, produced a key and unlocked the door of the Bali-Bally Department.

"Come in, all of you," she said. "Take seats along the wall. Mr. Phineas will be here any minute to conduct the interviews."

Toto thought her very attractive, in her hard blond way, though by no means so beautiful as Dorothy Lamour. Even so, it occurred to him, it might be fun to whisk her away for a weekend atop the Empire State Building while crowds gathered and the police hovered in helicopters; but he quickly suppressed this whimsical idea, and filed respectfully into the office along with the other applicants.

There were not enough chairs for all of them. Toto joined a nervous little group standing by the wall, while the blond secretary busied herself at her desk. "I might as well start the ball rolling," she announced, "while we're waiting for Mr. Phineas. I certainly didn't expect so many. Let me make it clear at the beginning that we want somebody experienced and responsible, preferably with references. There's every chance that Miss Lamour will ask to be photographed with the successful applicant."

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Toto's heart trembled, beat faster. He had no experience to offer, and no references, but he took pride in thinking he was responsible. And how could they possibly not prefer *him* over these wretched fakes? And to be photographed with . . . with . . . "I'll take your names," he heard the secretary saying—"You first." The man next to him started forward. "No, no, the other one. The one that's already got his suit on." Slowly, fearfully, Toto approached the desk.

"Name?" she said, pencil poised.

. . .

"Speak up. Don't mumble so. What is it?"

. . .

She threw down the pencil. "Oh, never mind! I can't take everybody's name anyway—there are too many. Why the hell didn't that stupid Phineas do all this through an employment agency?"

Toto, ashamed of his failure to communicate with her, desperately racked his brain. He might, of course, establish for her his authenticity by performing some of the indelicate little antics that so unfailingly delighted visitors to the zoo . . . But no, that would probably do more harm than good, would, in fact, quite ruin his chances of being thought responsible. It was better to retire and wait for Mr. Phineas.

"I can't say your costume is very convincing," she called after him as he backed away from the desk. "Still, it's up to Phineas to decide —Oh, *Mr. Phineas*!"

A little bowlegged man had bounded in, breathlessly throwing off his hat and overcoat. "I'm terribly sorry, Eloise honey," he cried, "to have dumped all this on you. Honestly, I didn't *realize*. Next time, sweetie, I'll do it all through an employment agency and let *them* screen people first."

"Oh, I don't mind, Mr. Phineas," she said, with a brave smile.

"That's the spirit, girl!" He patted her on the shoulder. "All right, all you Tarzans, let's have a look at you! Into the monkey suits and make it snappy!" And glancing at Toto, he added aside to Eloise, "A-ha, a real eager beaver!"

A real eager *gorilla*. But he stood patiently, waiting while all the men clambered into their suits. "Line up!" commanded Mr. Phineas, and they all took their places, as he walked along examining them with a shrewd, suspicious eye.

"Just look at *this* one!" he shrieked, pointing to an especially seedy individual standing next to Toto. "The *buttons* even show. He might as well have turned up in his long winter underwear! I'll bet there's not a *zipper* in the whole crowd." Toto was on the point of stepping forward to demonstrate that he had neither buttons nor zippers—most important of all, didn't need them—but before he could think of a decorous approach, Mr. Phineas had moved on.

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"*Honest*, Eloise," he was saying, sauntering up and down with his hands on his hips, "did you *ever* in your life see such a bunch of mangy, moth-eaten gorillas? That one there"—he flipped a hand in Toto's direction—"isn't *too* bad, I suppose. What do *you* think, honey?"

"Gee, Mr. Phineas, I *just* don't know," she said, gazing at them all in bewildered disappointment. "Would you like me to call up one of the employment agencies after all?"

"No, we haven't got time. It'll have to be one of these." And he gave Toto a long critical look.

Toto's heart was bursting with hope and joy, but he made every effort to contain himself. And then it happened, in all its horror—the door opened, and in came another *real gorilla,* an arrogant creature carrying a shining aluminum suitcase.

"I'm sorry, sir, I think we have *enough* applicants already—" Eloise began, but the newcomer, grinning, merely slavered at her lecherously. He set down his suitcase, opened it, and—to Toto's stunned mortification—took out a lustrous gorilla suit, into which he deftly proceeded to zipper himself. This process completed, he made a little bow to Mr. Phineas and Eloise, offering his arm for their inspection.

"Why, it's not gorilla fur at all," said Mr. Phineas, feeling the suit. "It's *genuine,* fine-spun, combed, nylon-acetate!"

"It's beautiful," breathed the secretary. "It's perfectly divine."

"And so *chic*," marveled Mr. Phineas. "Well, that settles it. He's definitely hired. All the rest of you can go now. Leave by the side door, please."

The men, grumbling and disconsolate, took off their gorilla suits and trooped out. Toto heard Eloise saying to the successful applicant, "It's just for one day, but you'll still have to fill out a withholding statement. What's your social security—" and then he was in the hallway, shuffling sadly towards the elevator. "Too bad, eh, Mac?" said the man next to him. "That's what always happens." But Toto had no idea whom he might be addressing.

He reached the street and began walking dejectedly up Broadway. Hurrying pedestrians brushed against him, but he hardly noticed them. He tried to take comfort in the knowledge that he hadn't really needed a job, and he only hoped that Mr. McCready wouldn't be too angry when he presented himself back at the zoo. At a corner newsstand he suddenly stopped, his attention caught by a screaming headline in the *Daily News*:

DRAGNET
OUT FOR
ESCAPED
GORILLA

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And the *Journal-American* announced in bold red letters:

TERROR GRIPS CITY AS KILLER APE PROWLS!

while underneath was a photograph, *his,* Toto's, with the caption, "Have You Seen This Gorilla?" and the telephone number to call in case you had. People milled about the newsstand trying to get a look at the picture, a few women clutched their bosoms, and one of them stepped on Toto's foot. "Oh, excuse me," she said, looking him right in the face.

Still, someone soon would recognize him—it was only a matter of time. He wondered whether to strike out boldly along Broadway or try to hide in some side-street, and as he stood, hesitating on the corner, a squad car stopped, and a policeman got out and tapped him on the shoulder.

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Avram Davidson's eight previous stories in F&SF have all been short (none much over 3500 words, or around 8 of these pages), if unusually memorable; and all of them have been set in the present or the past. I think you'll be as happily surprised as I was by the unexpected form of this latest Davidson: a full long-short-story, verging in content on the novelet, and set in a highly detailed future, logically arrived at by the best methods of science fiction. S.f. has not hitherto considered the future history of bodysnatching; but there may come a need, as Mr. Davidson perceptively points out, for the resurrection of that once-essential art — this time with correct legal formalism and a proper code of ethics . . . but will the half-educated mass public comprehend the distinction?

Up the Close and Doun the Stair

by AVRAM DAVIDSON

Up the close and doun the stair,
But and ben wi' Burke and Hare.
Burke's the butcher, Hare's the thief,
Knox the boy that buys the beef.

—Edinburgh folk rime, 1828

THE INCIDENT AT HAVEN OF REST Memorial Park hit the papers with a bang.

That is, it hit the *Tribune-American* first, and the other papers picked it up from there. The *Trib* was one of the Greiss Chain and it was right up their alley—old Gregory Perkins Greiss was still alive when the M. R. Act was passed, and the chain continued to stir up trouble at every opportunity, prodded from time to time by lavender-scented, lavender-colored notes from Lavinia Greiss, the Old Man's widow. *G. P. used to say*—and, *G. P. would have wished*—or, *"This horror-Bill," as G. P. used to call it* —so the notes began. But when the *Trib* got wind of this story it didn't require any prompting from the Dowager Publisher to break it.

Dr. Loren Winslow told the reporters, quite truthfully, that he hadn't had anything to do with Mrs. Hotaling's having signed the contract with the IAM. "*I* signed the death certificate: that was all,"

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he told them. Pressed to make any comments he cared to on the situation in particular or in general, he said that the only comment he cared to make was "No comment."

Big Blue Hotaling was still alive—but just barely—when the neighbors broke down the door. He died while Dr. Winslow was just beginning to examine him. But that preliminary examination was enough. He turned to the widow and the neighbor woman who was comforting her, and said—rather without any attempt at sympathy, for he knew the Hotalings well—"Well I'll be darned. Pneumonia. *Nobody* dies of pneumonia anymore.... Leave it to Blue to be different."

There was, however, nothing different about the period just before his unusual death. He came home with a case of booze, kicked Dolly out of the apartment, locked the door and started drinking. He did this about every six weeks. *This* time, however, he got crocked so fast and so thoroughly that he didn't even notice when the oil-burner quit working. Dolly, coming back cautiously on the fourth day of the binge, heard no noise in the apartment—no usual noise, that is, no singing or cursing. Only a curious sort of something or other. She didn't realize at the moment it was the noise Blue made while he was drowning in his own lung-fluid, but it worried her enough to call the neighbors, and so—

"I don't remember the last time I've heard of anyone dying of pneumonia," the physician said.

Dolly looked dry-eyed at the body of her husband (he didn't make a very pretty corpse, but then, he wasn't very pretty when alive, either—now, at least, he was quiet) and tried to cry.

The neighbor (her name was Linny Hart) felt no such obligation. "Well, he went painlessly, dear," she pointed out. Then her eyes narrowed. "Say—Doc. If it's so unusual, uh, wouldn't the IAM be interested? Huh, Doc?"

Winslow threw her a quick glance. "I suppose so," he said. "But that's not for me to say."

Linny nodded. "I don't suppose he left you no insurance or anything like that, Dolly? No, I thought not," as Dolly shook her head, silently. "Catch him doing someone else a favor! Well, he done one now, want to or not. *Sure*—I betchu the IAM will be *very* interested."

Dolly protested feebly, "Oh, Linny, I could-int! What Would People *Say?*"

"People don't have ta know," Linny pointed out. "Anyway, it's for their own good. Leave me see if the number is in this phone book here.... Unless the Dear Departed let his bill run on too long."

Blue's working companions were by no means as numerous as his drinking companions, but between

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the two groups, plus neighbors, there were quite a lot of people at the funeral, most of whom had turned in for a few prophylactic drinks before braving the raw cold en route to the crematorium. The minister made his departure as soon as he had shaken hands and murmered to the widow. The coffin slid out of sight. They waited for the flames. There were no flames. One or two of the men started to mutter. They looked at the mortician while the organ played. Then they looked towards the back of the room and growled. Dolly, by this time finally enabled to forget what Life With Big Blue had really been like, was snuffling into a handkerchief just large enough to cover the end of her nose. And the organ music went a note lower and the mortician opened the doors and indicated, with a glance at the people in the front row and a slight lift of his eyebrows, that the show was over and would they please file out and go away.

Fat Sol Feinstein stalked over and faced up to him.

"What's going on?" he asked, trying to reduce his hoarse rumble to a whisper.

"Why, ah, the services are over, sir," the mortician said, unhappily.

"Listen!" Sol twisted around, looked apologetically towards Dolly, swiveled back to the embalmer's flunkey. "Whaddaya mean: Over? Hah? How come no cremation, hah? Whaddaya tryin a pull?" He was joined by Fingers Feeney, Ugly Urquhart, and a few others.

"Gentlemen, gentlemen, *please*. I thought you knew, for Heaven's sake," the undertaker wound up. "This is a Reversion case. The actual cremation will take place—ah—'afterwards'. . . No scene, please, gentlemen?"

The men turned red. "See? Whad I tell ya?" Sol demanded. "Whad I tell ya?" He took the attendant mortician's lapels in his large hands. "Listen: *We* knew the Deceased. See? And we *know* he never signed no—Reversion. *He* told us plenty often what he thought of it. So don't try and pull no—" He turned again, as the unhappy undertaker's eyes went past him, and he glared at the man who had come up from the back of the room. The man was as large and tough-looking as any of them, but it was a smooth toughness. His clothes were conservative—solid reds and purples, instead of the gay figured designs most of the men had on—closer to the fashions of the late '70s than to the present.

He spoke in a low, patient voice, as if this was an everyday matter with him—as, indeed, it probably was. "The Right of Reversion Contract was signed by the widow," the man said.

Feeney swore. "I tole ya the minute I walked in, dinn I?" he yelled. "I can smell 'em, I can smell 'em

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a mile away! He's one a them lousy Burke and Hares!"

The IAM man took a piece of paper from his pocket, ignoring the growls and oaths. "This is a photostat of the contract, signed by Mrs. Dora Hotaling..." Dolly shrank down in the chair as she heard her name. She glanced at Linny Hart, who sat next to her. Linny said, in a low, swift whisper, "Don't panic. Leave it to me." Linny jumped up, bustled over. "Leave me see that," she demanded. The IAM man held it out to her. Linny put on a fine performance. Her mouth dropped lower and lower, her eyebrows crept higher and higher, as she scanned the photostat. Then she put her palms to the sides of her face and screamed.

"Oh, please," begged the attendant. "Please, my dear madam—" Urquhart dragged him back.

"So *that's* what it was!" Linny shrieked. "Ooo, you bunch of rotten liars! Oh, you terrible—She thought it was for the insurance! I was there! The man came up and said it was for Blue's insurance. She *never* would of—she'd rather cut off her right hand than —*Oh,* what an awful thing! Oh, poor Dolly!"

As Dolly, really scared now, began to cry, Ugly Urquhart grabbed the mortician. "Where's the body?" he demanded. The others took up the cry, elbowing closer.

It was the IAM man who answered. "It's been removed," he said, "according to the terms of the contract. Following research—"

Fat Sol cried, "You gahdamn *ghoul*!" swung at him, missed.

"—the remains will be cremated and properly interred. I have to remind you"—he raised his voice over the shouts—"that interference with the fulfillment of this contract constitutes a Federal offense under the Medical Research Act of—" Sol swung again. This time he didn't miss. Dolly began to scream. The attendant, unnoticed, scuttled away. Linny pressed her lips together, looked on with satisfaction.

The *Tribune-American* put it on page one, and within an hour it was unfolding from the press-slot of every 3-D set in the greater metropolitan area (a triangle reaching from Atlantic City to Poughkeepsie to Hartford).

THE SHAME OF AMERICA

Bluford Hotaling (or "Big Blue" as his many friends affectionately called him) was not a rich man. He wasn't a very healthy man, either. If he had lived in a house heated by a fission-pile (as does Dr. Theodore Treyer) he would never had died of pneumonia brought on by cold when the old-fashioned oil-burner in his own house broke down. And because he was neither healthy nor wealthy, the shameless agents of the Institute for American Medicine, headed by Dr. Theo-

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dore Treyer, had little difficulty in conning his grief-stricken widow into signing the infamous Reversion Contract. "It's only a form," these carrion-crows assured her. "Just to see you get your insurance money." Oh, she received money, all right—

Ted Treyer threw down the paper with a sigh. He looked up at his companion and, seeing the expression on her face, smiled.

But Beety Lowndas didn't smile back. "Ted," she asked, her tone troubled as her face. "Ted, is there any chance that the IAM agent who went to see this Mrs. Hotaling... I mean, there are so many agents that—the law of averages—"

Ted's smile faded. Beety was wearing the two-tone hair-do currently modish, blond one side, raven-black the other. Full figures were in fashion now once more, after the Maypole Madness (as sociologists were already beginning to call it) had gone out—completely out. Women who were naturally thin wore moldafoam padding. Beety (as Ted was in exceptional position to testify) neither wore nor needed any padding.

"Beety, sweety... Sometimes I wonder if you don't disbelieve everything I've ever told you. In which case it's a waste of time to do it again. But I'll try. First: No one can be an IAM agent unless he or she has a graduate degree in law, social work, or science. We don't hire unfrocked house-coppers. Secondly: no agent ever calls unless he's been asked. Thirdly—you haven't mentioned this, but I will, since it's part of the American mythology: there is no quota. Not for the agent, not for the district supervisor, not for anybody. The only thing even faintly resembling a quota is the allotment. And it's been a long, long time since any college has failed to receive its allotment. Fourth: *you* ask it."

By now he had recovered his usual high level of spirit. He was dark and his gold-flecked suit showed off his athletic build to advantage. His doctorate was in science, but not in medicine—in fact, he was one of the first to receive a D.Sc. from his university which was not a merely honorary one, and the university was taking good care that the new D.Sc. didn't go the way of the Ph.D.; but there was hardly an M.D. in the country who didn't defer to him. The Director of the IAM was, in theory, outranked by the President of the AMA, but the latter kept changing. And Treyer was only the second man to hold his office. He'd had it for five years now. He liked it.

Beety suddenly smiled. It was a warm, sweet smile. She was a warm, sweet person. They had been lovers for over a year now, and though Treyer was modern enough to acknowledge her and to see to it that she was invited wherever his wife (if he'd had one)

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would have been, he wasn't modern enough to accede to her request for a "free-born" child—as the current, sociologically-approved phrase was. He had, of course, shared her pleasure when Justice Blakeney's famous decision was issued recently.

"The concept of illegitimacy of children belongs," the Justice had said, *"to the days of slavery and the killing of witches, not to a society supposedly modern and enlightened. If the free-born child can inherit from the mother, there is no reason why that same child cannot inherit from the father."*

Thinking aloud, Treyer said, "Good man, Blakeney."

Beety leaned over and kissed his forehead—the gesture, by its deliberate avoidance of the conventionally-erotic kiss, indicated nowadays in all sophisticated circles that love was being enjoyed to its fullest extent whenever desired: so why bother with a pale proxy?

"Then how about it, Ted?" she asked. Her hair and skin were like honey.

He grinned. "Unnatural female! Would you have a child by a ghoul?"

"I'm sorry," she said, contritely. "I know you're right. About there being nothing improper in IAM methods, I mean. I know that..." her voice ebbed.

Treyer asked, "What is it, then? Michael and Kevin been sneering?" She nodded. "Oh, why the Hell d'you let those poor sapless twigs bother you? I know you can't help meeting them—and others like them—in the interior decorating business. But surely you can see that the wretched fellows will sneer at anyone who is capable of a love which they're denied?"

Her bright dark eyes ceased wandering around the office—it had been decorated before she'd even *met* Ted Treyer, let alone become his mistress, but it was such a perfectly-appointed room she'd never wanted to change it—and rested on him. "It isn't just Michael and Kevin," she said, slowly. "It's everybody. I want everybody to give you the respect and the honor you deserve. I want papers like the *Tribune-American* to stop sniping at you. I want the cheap comedians to stop being able to get a laugh just by asking, 'Is Dr. Treyer in the house?' I want...oh—" She made a gesture of despair.

Ted didn't smile. "I'll get it, someday—everything you want. I'm young and healthy and expect to live a long time. And I will certainly live to see all our critics dead or converted." He gestured to the left wall, the gold-plashed sleeve falling back from his golden-brown arm. "Have you ever wondered why I have a picture of—of all *possible* people—the Reverend Cotton Mather? You know what a terrible old man he was, a devil-in-robes. When he said the witches in Salem should be put to death, he was cheered. And when he—somehow,

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from somewhere—got a correct idea in his hard old head, and urged inoculation against smallpox, why, the ones who'd cheered him a little while before, they threw rocks at his manse and smashed all the windows.

"I keep it as a lesson. If I were to go out this minute and preach that... oh"—he groped for words—"that all red-headed Swedes, let's say, have inferior genes, and shouldn't be allowed to marry, or should be interned, every yahoo and gutter gorilla who curses me now would stand up and cheer."

She nodded, rather sadly. The recorded peal of bells, which had replaced the harsh ring on all but the most old-fashioned phones, sounded their silvery tones. With a swift "Excuse me," Treyer switched on. A fat, furious face filled the screen.

"*Doc*-tor Treyer!" The face lit up with enraged glee, the voice grated out its heavy sarcasm. "Or should I say Doctor Knox? Or Mister Boik? Or Mister Hare?"

Treyer clicked his tongue. "What the devil—" He diddled the switch. No calls like this were supposed to get through to him, but there was a new girl at the Intake, and—the face flickered, but remained. Treyer gave up. "All right. What do you want?"

"We want Blue Hotaling's body—that's what we want. We're gunna swear out a injunction, see. You better not move him to none of your gahdamn vet schools in the meanwhile, see? He wasn't rich"—the face had evidently read the front-page *Trib* editorial—"but he's got lotsa friends. So—" Treyer diddled the switch again, this time the face and voice vanished, were replaced by the apologetic Intake operator. Treyer muttered that it was all right, switched off.

He walked over and put his arms on Beety's shoulders. "You see? You and I can take it. But suppose we *did* have a child? Everytime some other child would quarrel with him, they'd throw it in his face: 'Your old man is a grave-robber.' Don't you *know* that?" She said not a word, but looked at him with sorrow deep in her eyes. He leaned closer, pressed his lips to her forehead.

In the kaleidoscope of colors the black robes of Judge Mountree drew every eye. There was talk, from time to time—shop talk, never making the public media—that the American judiciary was going to abandon black for scarlet. But if this imitation of judgely garb in other countries was planned, it had yet to take place. Aside from the robe there was nothing unusual about Mountree's appearance. He listened attentively—or, at any rate, with every appearance of attention—to the lawyers.

MacKenna, for the IAM, wearing the blue with golden sunbursts which was almost his trademark,

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said that he was going to trace the background of the case before them. "Although it is the same background which I have traced for several hundred similar cases," he said, "the continued appearance of similar cases indicates that memory is short and requires continual refreshment. So—with your honor's indulgence..."

At the time the science of anatomy and of post-mortem section was first beginning its development [MacKenna said], the only source of bodies for the purpose of instruction was the gallows. The supply of executed criminals not being sufficient, a certain member of the medical profession in another country—Dr. Knox of Scotland, to be precise—prompted by a zeal which caused him to transgress the too-rigid laws of the time, contracted with a pair of ne'er-do-wells to purchase from them bodies taken clandestinely from graveyards. These two Resurrection Men, as they were then, with a rather grisly and irreverent humor, called, finding the physical labor of redigging graves and lifting out the heavy coffins...

(Dolly Hotaling, wearing a chic mourning-gown of pink and purple, gave a dying-fall groan and went stiff. Commotion in court. Dolly carried out. Order restored. MacKenna, still bland and benign and pink of face, continued.)

...began to murder such poor and friendless folk as fortune sent their way. They sold the bodies to Dr. Knox for his anatomy classes. Their discovery, the conviction and execution of one of them, the other having saved his life by giving evidence for the Crown—all these dreadful events produced a change in attitudes. Thereafter, both in Great Britain and the United States, the laws were altered so as to allow the bodies of those who died with none to claim their last remains—to allow these bodies to be assigned to medical schools for scientific purposes. This method sufficed for well over a century—for almost a century and a half.

But then it seemed that, in one way at least, science had outdistanced itself. It had drawn on the bodies of paupers, vagrants—people of that unfortunate class. The homeless, those without family or estate. We could well be proud that the advance of the American Economy—the American Way of Life—the progress of our social therapies on every front—had more or less completely eliminated this source. Source of—ah—*subjects*—for post-mortem sections. This posed a considerable problem. It affected not only the medical schools, but every living American—particularly if he wished to remain a *living* American. How could the science of anatomy—of surgery—be taught without proper subjects?

The various medical schools, to-

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gether with the American Medical Association, met and, with admirable foresight, drew up the historical "Preliminary Agreement on Research Rights." The rest we all know. The only way that a person may now legally dispose of posthumous rights in his or her own body is through the Institute for American Medicine, chartered by Congress for this very purpose. A very sizeable sum of money is paid —although the amount, of course, varies according to the age and general physical condition of the legator—and the fingerprints are recorded in the great central file in Washington. I may add, since it applies specifically to this case we are now considering, that it is also legally impossible for a next-of-kin to dispose of research rights in the body of a loved one, except to the IAM.

The Congress has supplied the necessary implimentive legislation, in the Medical Research Act. It is mandatory for the fingerprints of every person who dies to be checked via telephoto with the great central files. If Reversion in the body was sold, the body must be turned over to the IAM. No sale can ever be canceled or invalidated.

I think all right-thinking Americans will agree that the IAM performs its great public service with superb tact and efficiency. Funeral services according to all denominational usages are allowed before possession is taken of the body, and time is even allotted for additional ceremonies in case the legator had belonged to a fraternal organization with which funerary pomps are customary. Following the completion of the period of educational usefulness, the remains are then cremated —except in the case of Orthodox Jews and Roman Catholics, where burial is respectfully granted—and the ashes are returned for disposal according to the desires of the next-of-kin; or else they are placed without extra charge in the various regional columbaria.

The results are as follows: First, that medical science is enabled properly to educate its students. Second, that rivalry in purchase of bodies or of Reversional Research Rights in bodies has been completely eliminated. A fair allocation is made among all the medical schools of the country. Third, that the unsavory black market in postmortem subjects, which flourished briefly before the passage of the Medical Research Act, has been completely eliminated. It is now several years since it was last found necessary to prosecute a so-called "Body Broker." It *is* still, alas, occasionally necessary to act to prevent clandestine burials, particularly on the part of certain obdurate religious groups, but we are confident that the passing of time and the inevitable spread of public enlightenment will see the end of this before very long.

Now, the facts in the case of the

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late Bluford Hotaling are quite clear. His widow, Mrs. Dora—or "Dolly"—Hotaling, or someone acting for her, called the regional office of the IAM and requested an agent. The agent was sent, you will hear his testimony, and will be able to satisfy yourself that neither guile nor duress was used in obtaining Mrs. Hotaling's signature. There is, therefore, no grounds at all for granting an injunction to interfere with a process sanctioned by law, and essential to the physical well-being of the great American people.

While Ted Treyer listened to MacKenna he kept rubbing the bruised place on his forehead. He felt almost no pain, having gotten medical care almost at once. But he continued to rub it. He scowled, thinking of what had happened.

It was only a block from the IAM Building. The moving-overhead was being repaired and it was necessary to hold up traffic to allow pedestrians to walk across the street. Three hulking men—house-wreckers or piano-movers, by the looks of them—came clumping down the escalator from the m-o. Treyer had a few theories about people who *walked* on escalators—probably these three even walked on the m-o—they were unadjustable, they . . . but before he could consider the theories, they spotted him. One of them was the fellow who'd called him at the office. His eyes went wide with recognition.

"There's that sonofabitchbastard!" he yelled. "He's tryin a make a gedaway!"

And they swarmed up to his car, shouting, "Ya —— Boikenhare! Ya gahdamn ghoul! Graverobba!" Treyer tried simultaneously to roll up the shatterproof bubble and to dial Emergency on the dashboard, but in trying to do both he failed to do either well. The bubble went part way up and stopped, and the dial went red, showing he'd botched the call.

"Doctuh T'eadaw Body-snatchin Treyer!" the three gorillas howled, boosting one of their number up to climb over the stalled bubble. "You pulled ya last doidy trick—you ain't cheatin no maw gahdamn widows!"

They shrieked for his blood while other pedestrians called out their approval and those riding in the other stalled cars either sat scowling at him or joined the chorus.

"That's Treyer," he heard one well-groomed woman say. "You know—that awful person who—"

"Must've got some poor widow to sign when she didn't know what she was doing—drugged her, maybe—and I guess those are the dead woman's sons—"

"Go on—give it to him good! The dirty Burke and Hare!"

And the lead gorilla, standing on the shoulders of his sweating companions, leaned far forward and struck at Treyer with his huge fist. Ted fell back. He was fumbling in

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the compartment for his gun (thinking, all the while, *This will be a lovely scandal, if I shoot the sod!*) when the bubble suddenly sprang up, dumping the housewrecker and his friends into the street. Traffic cleared a split second later, and he sped away.

He'd been insulted before, of course, and once, in the slums of Madison Avenue (the advertising business had long since moved up to Pleasantville), he'd had a bag of garbage dropped on him from a window. But this was the first time a direct bodily attack had ever been made on him. He shivered, rubbed his forehead.

The lawyer for the Housewrecker's Union (or whatever organization it was which was fronting for Hotaling's friends) was a ruddy-faced man in eggshell-and-green. Treyer had never seen him before. He painted the domestic life of Big Blue and Dolly in such terms that the latter found herself (now that she was back in the courtroom, with a cup of water in one hand and a hankie in another) weeping steadily. It wasn't true, of course, but it ought to have been. She wept for the happy life Mr. Anger described, a life she'd never had.

There she sat, weeping then as she is weeping now [Anger chanted]—the body of her faithful, hardworking husband barely cold. There is a ring at the door—a harsh, old-fashioned ring, for the Hotalings, unlike Dr. Theodore Treyer, do not live in a luxurious modern apartment with a 3D screen to announce callers with its rich and melodious peal of bells. The poor widow, of course, is too broken with grief to answer it. This task is done for her by a neighbor, Mrs. Linny Hart. In walks—or perhaps I *should* say, in *crawls*—a strange man. *We* know who it was. *She*—at that most dreadful moment—did not. How did he know that the Dark Angel had just been a-calling in this humble apartment? Doubtless he has his methods. Doubtless the vultures know when to swoop—and the hyenas—and the jackals.

From what loathsome bit of chicanery did this agent come? Had he gotten the trembling signature of some drink-sodden wretch on his wicked contract? Had he slipped gold into the hand of some callow college-boy? Had he found, had he smelled out, let us say, some unhappy young wife or husband who had lost the paycheck or the housekeeping money in a gambling den—the proprietor of which doubtless works hand-in-filthy-hand with such agents? No matter. The tale, whatever it was, cannot be any but an evil one.

Into the house of grief and sorrow comes the IAM man, his eyes quick to note the signs of honest poverty—for I say that poverty *does* still exist, despite my learned colleague's ingenuous disclaimer to

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the contrary. He notes the dazed and anguished expression on poor Dolly's care-worn face. *He even reads her mind!*—no hard task for him, he's done it before.

What *is* on her mind? Is she mourning the loss of a breadwinner? Is she worrying how to pay the next month's rent? Oh, no. Oh, no. It is not of her own concerns. *How will I bury him,* is what she thinks of. *How will I get the funds to give him a proper burial.* Instantly the IAM agent whips out his infamous document and presents it to the confused widow. *"Insurance,"* he says. *"Sign here. Cash payment."* And—innocently, trustingly — she signs. Imagine, then, the scene at the Haven of Rest Memorial Park Chapel: imagine the widow's shock, her fright, her terror—on finding out that the so-called "Insurance" paper was in reality a Reversion Contract, and that [he half-turned towards the widow, and then ostentatiously lowered his voice] his body, before it can be committed to the clean fires, will be made the plaything of medical students.

Your Honor will recall the decision of New Jersey Chief Justice Arthur Vanderbilt in 1957 when a large corporation applied for the disinterment of a body. The corporation sought to perform an autopsy in order to question the decision in a workman's compensation case. The learned Chief Justice said: *"In the search for the truth we must not disregard the problems of religion, the wishes of the decedent, the sensitiveness of loved ones and friends or even the elements of public health and welfare. The law, then, will not reach into the grave in search of 'the facts' except in the rarest of cases, and not even then unless it is clearly necessary, and there is reasonable probability that such a violation of the sepulcher will establish what is sought."*

In a number of cases, decades later, this decision was cited to prevent the IAM from taking possession of bodies, and it was ruled that in such cases the IAM could sue for the return of whatever moneys it had paid for Rights of Research and Reversion in and of the bodies in question.

Later, of course, Mr. Justice Blakeney—who has lately gained more fame for another judicial opinion—overruled these decisions, ruled in favor of the IAM. He said, "the elements of public health and welfare" required that the IAM be upheld. He did *not* inquire—but we do now—why it is that not a single member of the medical profession has, in the last ten years, signed an IAM Contract. Why not? Is it because they know it is unnecessary? Or is it simply because they do not need the money? Is it only the bodies of the *poor* which are to be rifled from the tomb? This is "class legislation" at its wickedest!

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Another aspect of the matter is the obdurate refusal of the IAM to permit the importation of cadavers. Unprejudiced experts have testified that enough such cadavers are and always will be available to make unnecessary the signing of an R. & R. Contract by a single American. But Dr. Treyer will not allow it. He sits pat on Article XXIII of his charter—the one known universally as the No Foreign Corpse Clause. One would have thought that chauvinism was absent from the scientific mind. Either one is wrong—or Dr. Treyer's is not a scientific mind.

We ask your honor to grant an injunction preventing the IAM from disposing of the body of the late Bluford Hotaling until a higher court shall decree otherwise. In the meanwhile, we intend to press for a decision from such a court declaring the Medical Research Act unconstitutional on the grounds that the right of contract cannot extend into the charnel house, that if there can be no right of property in a living man there can be none in a dead man, and that such contracts—like Restrictive Covenants—while not illegal, are legally unenforceable.

Let us have mercy on the dead. For—in the words of the poet—

Strength fails unto the grave.
Worms have fed on Hector brave.
Dust hath closéd Helen's eye.
I am sick. I must die.
Lord, have . . . mercy . . . upon . . . us.

There was a long, long silence. Finally, as Judge Mountree cleared his throat, MacKenna leaned over and whispered to Treyer, "Anger has *talent!*"

Treyer whispered, "See if you can get him for *us.*"

The Judge said, "Well, the court will take it under advisement. And, in the meanwhile: where is the deceased at present? In the mortuary of the Institute for American Medicine? He had better remain there." And he rustled out.

After that there was the hearing in connection with the scuffle at the funeral. Cases involving the slugging of IAM agents were common enough and usually attracted no particular attention from the communications media. But the Hotaling Case, thanks largely to the Greiss Chain's *Tribune-American,* was front-page, front-screen news. The interview with the Associate President in connection with his meeting with the Assistant President on the proposed admission of Tannu-Tuva to the UN was switched to the side screens. Few viewers bothered to arrange their mirrors so as to be able to glance at both.

Treyer and MacKenna pressed their way slowly through the crowded corridor, Ted with his head low to avoid the 3D cameramen. A crew was interviewing

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someone just ahead of them—a sort of indoor version of the man-in-the-street.

"—guy was tellin me, an this guy he *knows,* see? he was tellin me that the Boikenhares got a quoda, see? they got this quoda an if it ain't filled so they loose their jobs. That's why they hang around the race tracks an the hawsrooms, see, they get these poor slobs which they're down on their luck, an ged um ta sign them lousy contracks."

Although Treyer had heard and read all this a thousand times, it was suddenly too much for him. He shoved forward and thrust his head in between the man and the camera-microphone.

"I want the people to know that this man is lying!" he cried.

"Now, *waida-min*-ute!" the man protested.

The 3D operator brightened. "This is Dr. Theodore Treyer, isn't it? The head of the IAM. Would you care to comment, Doctor—"

"Yes, I'd care to comment! This fellow should be down on his knees thanking me and all of us for the vital and necessary work which we are doing, instead of mouthing these lies. A generation ago he'd have been repeating the old slanders against the Red Cross—that they charged wounded soldiers for blood-transfusions, and so on." The crowd gathered around and began to mutter. Treyer raised his voice.

"In every generation there has to be at least one man who gets the dirty end of the stick, who has to bear the brunt of ignorance and fanaticism and reaction—and it looks like this time it's me. Well, I want you to know that I'm in good company! Men like Galileo—Semmelweiss — Pasteur—" Someone, with a muffled curse, gave him a low, swift punch. He turned and seized the man—or the one he thought was the man—and grappled with him. And then the mob was all around him, and then he went down.

That evening he lay on the divan in his apartment. Beety was across the room, making him a drink. The phone-screen was on and a man who looked like Warren G. Harding was speaking to him. On the floor lay a crumpled copy of the *Tribune-American,* the front page showing Treyer tussling with the man in the corridor. The caption: "GET DOWN ON YOUR KNEES TO ME," SAYS BURKE AND HARE CHIEF.

Dr. Lars P. Dana, the current President of the AMA, had been talking for ten minutes and had begun to repeat himself. "Tact, *tact,* TACT!" bellowed Dr. Dana. "You've got to keep your agents away from funerals. You've got to stop shooting off your mouth to reporters. You've got to stop brawling in public—twice in one day, well, I mean. And on *this* day, too, really."

"What else have I got to do?"

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Ted asked, softly, but not politely.

Dana's mouth worked. Then he turned red. "Listen here, young man—"

"My ears are ringing from all the listening I've been—"

"The honor and prestige of the medical profession may mean little to you, you're not a member of it, but—"

Ted sat up, wincing. Beety came over and handed him his drink. Dana scowled. "The IAM was headed, if you remember, by a member of the medical profession before I took it over. And a nice hash he made of it, too. Remember? If the AMA is willing to spend a few millions on a campaign of public education—"

And so it went, back and forth, like a shuttlecock, until they both grew tired and switched off. Ted lay back and groaned. Then he reached out his arms to Beety. She didn't come. Instead, she asked, slowly, "Ted. Explain something to me."

"Can't I explain to you, *afterwards?*"

She shook her head. "*Why* won't you allow the importation of foreign subjects?"

He sighed. "Because dissecting dead coolies isn't the best possible training for a physician unless he's going to spend his life treating live coolies."

She nodded, but apparently there was something else on her mind. He didn't want to hear it. "It's been a long, weary day, love," he said. "I want you."

It was seldom that he even had to speak of his need or desire for her. She sensed it. But now she stayed where she was. "Ted—" she began again. He went limp, turned away. "Ted, today—this afternoon, I mean—I went with Edith Whitney to the Childs' Hospital Clinic. Her little baby has a clubfoot, and she's all broken up about it."

He said, coldly, still not looking at her, "No reason for emotion. The condition is completely operable."

"Yes, but still . . . Well, anyway, we were talking to a Dr. Kronengold—"

Ted said he knew him. "Troublemaker," he said.

"Well, he was wonderful to Edith. And he said he was going to show us something, but we weren't to get frightened. A good thing he warned us . . . because I'd have sworn it was a baby's *foot!*"

Treyer muttered, " 'Don't bother to wrap it up: I'll eat it on the way home.' "

Beety smiled, briefly and uncertainly. "But Dr. Kronengold said it wasn't real—he said it was synthetic. Isn't it a funny thing—well, I mean, *curious*—that people will sign over their own bodies, but not those of children?" Treyer grunted. "So it's almost impossible to get subjects for dissection or even noncontractual autopsy—in pediatrics,

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I mean. But you surely know all that. Well, as a result, Kronengold and a few of his associates—"

"Ginzberg, Felberman, and Cohen," said Treyer, with a peculiar emphasis.

She stared at him. Then she went on, unhappy, but determined. "They've devised these simulacra to help them in their research on crippled children. He says they can duplicate any physical condition."

"At more than half the cost of natural subjects—and at a nice little profit to Drs. Kronengold, Ginzberg, Felberman and Cohen."

Doggedly, Beety went on. "The cost doesn't matter. What I think *does* matter is that if the AMA will subsidize them in their work, you can get *out* of all this."

Painfully, Treyer swung himself to a sitting position. "The AMA has a fifty-year contract with the IAM," he said, "and I don't intend to release a single day of it. As for 'getting out of all this'—where do you think I could go? I'm notorious. I'm the nation's top ghoul. Mothers scare their children with me. I've stepped on too many toes and bloodied too many noses. There's no place for me except the place I've battled out for myself. Does an ex-whore, once she's gone respectable, hire her ex-pimp? I *can't* 'get out of all this'—because if I do, the only way I can go is down."

She shook her head. After a minute she said, "But if you *lead* the movement . . . I mean, the public will forget . . ."

He smacked his hand into the divan. "Damn the public! I spit on the public! You saw how they handled me today. What are they but oxen? And what is the natural fate of oxen, but the butcher? Who signs my contracts? Not the people who matter. Riffraff, scum, housewreckers, beanpickers — nobody who matters."

She said, "Everybody matters. . . ." She said, "Then it is just the other way around, isn't it?"

He got to his feet, stretched his lithe, golden-brown body. He said, "*What's* just the other way around?" And he padded across the floor towards her, a crooked grin on his face.

"Don't—" She put out her hand, stiffly. He stopped, puzzled. "I mean, it's just the opposite from the way you've explained it. It isn't the newspapers or the 3D or the mobs who stand in the way of progress. It isn't the ignorant who want to hold the clock back. It's you: Theodore Treyer, Doctor of Science, Director of the Institute for American Medicine. You're the one who represents reaction. You're the king of the castle, with your huge salary and your army of agents who say 'Yes, chief' and your lawyers and your office and your three-level apartment. You'd go right on robbing graves? But you can't say it's for the sake of science anymore. You can't hide behind that. . . ."

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He took advantage of her engrossment in what she was saying to pad closer. He reached out now, and put his hands on her.

"It isn't so," he said, softly, "And I'll explain to you just how and why. But not now. Later." She relaxed, slowly, in his hands. He drew her to him, unprotesting but cold.

"We'll do it your way," he said.

Her face brightened. But they had different things in mind.

"I'll give you that baby you've been wanting," he said. "Free-born or in wedlock—whichever you prefer."

Suddenly she was standing away from him. Quite a distance away.

She said, "No."

His face grew dark. He swayed, began to move forward. "Why not?" he asked.

"You already said it. I won't have a child by a ghoul."

His head snapped back. She went on, "As long as I thought it was necessary, I could stand for anything. But now that I know it's not science—not medical necessity—but your own greed and ego only—I can't stand for any of it. I shuddered, just then, when you touched me. And whenever I think of the times before—how close I came to bearing your child—I'll shudder again. . . . I'll fight you, you know. You've *got* to lose."

He watched her in silence as she moved towards the door. Then he cried out her name. She turned. "Don't," he said. "Don't." But she said nothing as she went out.

The city, as he looked out from his window, was dark. It was full of people who hated him, feared him—but over whom he had power. "I'll fight!" he cried out to the silent city. "I'll fight! If I fall, I'll fall like Lucifer! If I can't be loved, then let me be hated. I can feed on that, if not on the other—" But then, far below, he heard a car start off. "It's her," he whispered. And he began to weep.

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Dentistry is one science which has been regrettably neglected in science fiction; and F&SF feels an obligation to fill this dental gap. Douglas Angus' About Time to Go South *(F&SF, October, 1957) stressed the importance of dentistry in a period of post-Atomic collapse; and now Gordon Dickson takes young Jeffrey Willoughby, D.D.S., into Space, where his art solves a problem for an agreeable brace of symbiotic races — who in return solve Jeff's own personal, embarrassing and wholly extra-dental problem. It's all, as you will learn, simply*

A Matter of Technique

by GORDON R. DICKSON

JEFFREY WILLOUGHBY LOWERED HIS copter down through the soft, moonlit summer night to the silver landing pad alongside the Dirksen residence. The Dirksen residence was dark. The copter landed with an almost imperceptible jar. Jeffrey cleared his throat, gave a completely unnecessary final fiddle to the controls and turned his head to look at Pat Dirksen.

Pat looked at him.

There was silence in the copter cab. Jeffrey cleared his throat.

"Well," said Pat. "Isn't it nice out, tonight?"

The scent of her perfume raced up his nostrils and gave a healthy spin to his senses. Her dark hair poured around her slim shoulders like molten jet in the dim light. Her lips were soft, half-parted and mysterious. Her breasts stirred under the summer tunic. She was obviously waiting.

"Fine." said Jeffrey.

"Well—" said Pat. She shifted a little into the corner of the seat and lifted her chin slightly in his direction. Her lips parted a bit more.

Jeffrey cleared his throat again.

"I like you, Jeff," said Pat.

"Oh?" said Jeffrey in a slightly strangled voice.

"I feel as if I've known you for years."

"Uh . . . you do?"

"Years and years. Well—" said Pat, wriggling slightly on the seat of the copter.

"W-well . . ." stammered Jeffrey.

"Well—"

"Well . . ."

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"Oh, for goodness' sake, Jeffrey!" snapped Pat. "Can't you say anything but *'well'?"*

"Well . . ." said Jeffrey. Pat snapped suddenly upright on the seat of the copter, as if she had been jerked straight by a string.

"Six weeks!" she cried furiously.

"I beg your pardon?" Jeffrey quavered.

"Six weeks!" Pat slammed open the door of the copter and bounced out onto the landing pad. She slammed the door back shut again and addressed him through the open window. "Six weeks we've been going out almost every night and all you do is sit there and say *'well.'* What do you think I'm made out of—cotton candy? If I hear you say that word *'well'* once again I'll scream! What's wrong with you anyway?"

"Well . . ." began Jeffrey.

Pat screamed. It was a good scream. An upstairs light went on in the Dirksen house.

"Pat!" yelled Jeffrey in alarm, tumbling his long lean body in panic out of the copter in pursuit. "Don't—I mean—"

"Stay away from me!" yelped Pat, backing off in the direction of the front door. "Go away! Go far away! Don't ever call me again!"

"But how'll I get in touch with you, then?" babbled Jeffrey. "I mean—when am I going to see you again?"

"Never!" cried Pat, fumbling with the door before her. She got it open. "Never, never, never, *never!"*

And the thunderous slam of the door behind her put a period to her words.

"Dr. Jeffrey Lane Willoughby?" said the Space Service captain, dubiously.

"Yes." Haggard, hollow-eyed and with desperate lines around the mouth, Jeffrey tottered before the desk in the recruitment center.

"Sit down," said the captain. Jeffrey dropped into a chair. The captain regarded the papers before him with a bewildered eye. "You *are* a dentist, Doctor?"

"And a member of the reserve. Yes," said Jeff.

"I realize that," said the captain. He was a lean, rather pale, but at the same time hard-looking man of about Jeffrey's age. His uniform fit him like a sheath on a knife. "It's just that—you realize—well, the service pay for your grade"—he consulted the papers—"lieutenant, in your case, is only eight thousand a year."

"I know," said Jeffrey.

"And you must be making twice that in civilian practice."

"Three times," said Jeffrey. "That's beside the point. I want to go on active duty. You do need dentists in the Service, don't you?"

"Yes, we do."

"Particularly out on the new planets—with exploratory parties? Light-years from Earth?"

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"Indeed, yes," said the captain.

"Fine," said Jeffrey feverishly. "Sign me up. As far out as you can send me, please. Do you have such a thing as a twenty-year hitch? I couldn't sign up for life, could I? I mean—"

"Just a second, please. Here, have a cigaret," said the captain.

"Thanks, I don't smoke."

"Drink?"

"No, thanks. And I've had breakfast. What I want is—"

"Please, doctor," said the captain. "I promise you I can assign you to active duty as far out as you want to go. We're crying for medical and dental officers nowadays in Exploration. It's just that for the sake of the Service we ought to know *why* you want to give up a lucrative practice and put on a uniform at much less pay. Usually we have to fight like hell even to draft men in your position. Now tell me: why do you want to go on active duty?"

"Why? Oh . . ." Jeffrey gulped. "Well—uh, to be frank with you—well, you see—all my life—girls—"

"You aren't in some jam involving a criminal action toward some woman?" inquired the captain, peering at him.

"Oh, no!" cried Jeffrey. "You don't understand. Women—well . . . Look," he wound up miserably, "can't we just say I want to get away from a woman?"

"We can, of course," said the captain. "And, as I say, needing dentists as we do, I'm not going to argue. You're sure there's nothing more you want to tell me, though?"

"Positive!" said Jeffrey, with explosive fervor.

"Well, then, if you'll stand up and raise your right hand—"

"Welcome aboard, Doctor!" said Captain Lyse, cheerfully shaking Jeffrey's hand. Jeffrey was more than a little pale and unsteady on his feet, in spite of the fine stiff creases of his new uniform. He made quite a contrast to the captain of the E. S. *Galactic,* who in spite of some forty-odd years, was tanned and muscular in fatigue shorts and T-shirt. "Sit down."

"Uh—thank you," said Jeffrey, wobbling into a chair. "I had no idea they could transport you so fast nowadays—I mean—"

"Oh, this instantaneous transfer system has its drawbacks," said Lyse, heartily, "but it's fine for anything up to three hundred pounds in Earth-weight. After that, the power involved—here, drink this."

"Thank you, sir." Jeffrey swallowed. *"Gak!"*

"Something wrong?" inquired Lyse, interestedly. Jeffrey wheezed.

"Was that whisky?" he managed to whisper after a minute or so.

"Bourbon. A blend," said the captain. "Good, wasn't it? Just the thing for the collywobbles." He capped the bottle and set it aside with an air of satisfaction.

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"Yes," husked Jeffrey.

"Feeling better now, eh? Well, we're certainly glad to have you with us on the *Galactic,* Doc. We haven't had doctor or dentist on this ship since the last voyage. We were supposed to get a replacement before we shipped out, but you know how short-handed they are in your department. If you'll just hand me your papers—those things you're carrying in your hand there."

"Oh," said Jeffrey, handing them over.

"Thanks. Um—*'will assign . . . E. S.* Galactic . . . *Pending further duty . . .'* Yes, yes, all in customary order—*what!"*

"What?" inquired Jeffrey, staring.

"'Assigned to temporary duty only pending further departmental decision'—but that means you aren't permanent!"

"It does?" said Jeff.

"Of course it does."

"Nonsense," said Jeff, firmly. "I don't know why that enlistment officer did that; but I'm in for good, Captain. I'll probably die in the Service."

"I don't see how you could do that," said the captain, doubtfully. "Still—don't let me argue you out of it," he added hastily. "We'll just go ahead as if you were permanent. The men will be glad to see you; and then there's this 'ittle 'ing of mine—oo see? 'Ook 'ight up 'ere 'y 'y 'inger—it's 'ore—"

"You haven't been brushing your teeth properly," said Jeff, looking.

"I 'ush 'y 'eeth—I mean, I brush my teeth every day," said the captain indignantly.

"Well, you aren't doing it properly, or long enough, or hard enough," said Jeff. "Your gums need exercise. When they don't get it, little pockets of infection like that are liable to form. If you'll fix me up with a technician to help me out, I'll put you down for an appointment tomorrow morning and give your teeth a good scaling. *And* show you how to use a brush."

"Uh—of course," said Lyse. "If you'll come along with me, Doctor . . ."

"—next," said Jeffrey, one bright morning several weeks later.

"There isn't any next, sir," replied his technician, a lean, mournful individual named Hokerman. "That's all the patients there were, today."

"You mean I've finally caught up?" said Jeffrey. "Well! Well . . . I think I'll hang up my jacket, drop down to the Officer's Rec and have one to cool the tubes as the saying goes."

"Yes sir," said Hokerman.

Jeff went down to the bar.

"One to cool the tubes," he said to the enlisted man behind the bar there. The Officer's Rec was deserted at this early hour. "How's it lifting, Smitty?"

"Fine, sir," said the barman. "What kind of bourbon today, sir?"

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"Oh, any old jet-wash you happen to have handy. Make it a double. I'm getting rock-happy from being stuck here so long."

"You might get out and take a look at the native villagers, sir."

"Might flip myself dirtside for a quick scan at that. I haven't been outside the hull since I beamed in. What kind of gooks are they, Smitty?"

"Pretty human, Doctor. I don't know how they rate on the anthro scale, but I can't see any difference. And their women . . . Of course those elephant-sized sheep dogs with tusks they lead around are something different. They're alien as you like."

"Women, eh?"

"Yes sir."

"Fire me another double burst of that happy-juice, Smitty. Women, eh? Well, maybe I better stay safely aboard. It was a woman that caused me to end up out here, Smitty. Didn't know that, did you?"

"No sir. Here you are, sir."

"Yep. That's the way it is. You know how it goes. You go on loving and leaving them—what the hell, after all, I'm as human as the next stud—and then one of them gets you in a tight spot and starts putting the squeeze on. To start with, it's fun, then you get tired of good-looking females chasing you all the time and you tell 'em straight: *Jet off, woman—"*

"Attention Dr. Willoughby!" broke in the squawk box above the bar. "Attention Dr. Willoughby! You are wanted in the Captain's office. You are wanted in the Captain's office, immediately."

"Well," said Jeff, tossing down his second drink and choking only slightly. "Guess I got to fire all and travel. See you later, Smitty."

"Yes sir."

Jeff went out.

"Oh, hello, Doc," said Captain Lyse, as Jeff walked in. "I want you to meet one of the local people who has a problem you may be able to help solve. Miss Jjarja Leonla, Dr. Willoughby, our dentist."

"Gug," said Jeff.

"How do you do?" inquired Miss Jjarja Leonla, in musical tones.

"D-d-d-do?" stuttered Jeff. "Oh—uh—er—fine. Fine. Fine. Fine . . ."

"You feeling all right, Doc?" inquired Lyse.

"Fine," said Jeff. "Fine. Uh . . . fine."

"You look pretty red in the face. And you're sweating. You're sure—"

"Fine. No. Yes. I mean. Fine," said Jeff.

"Well, all right. Now Miss Jjarja—Doc, Miss Jjarja is over here."

"Oh, is she?" cried Jeff, wrenching his eyes away from the ceiling, meeting Miss Jjarja's violet glance for a soul-searing second and looking desperately away again. "Hello."

"How do you do?" said Jjarja.

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"Fine," said Jeff.

"Yes. Well, the point is," said Lyse, a little impatiently, "Miss Jjarja's people have a co-culture with the large beings I believe you've seen mingling with them—the Asona. Now, her personal Asona—"

"Excuse me!" broke in Jeff desperately. "Could I talk to you a second outside, sir? Please. Sir?"

"Well—" Lyse frowned. "Excuse us, Miss—" he led the way out into the corridor and closed the door. Jeff leaned limply against a wall. "Well?" demanded the captain.

"Doesn't she . . . don't they . . . I mean," stammered Jeff, "don't she wear any clothes?"

Lyse frowned in bewilderment.

"She's wearing clothes."

"But I mean *clothes!*" said Jeff desperately. "I mean that—er—cover her—well . . ."

"Oh, that's the native costume. They're quite used to it." Lyse clapped Jeff on the back. "You'll get used to it too in no time. I know—they're so damn human, particularly the women. Bothered me too at first. And this is a particularly beautiful wench. But you'll adjust."

"I—I will?"

"Certainly. Come on back inside. . . . Now, Miss Jjarja," said Lyse, as they reentered the room, "I know I don't have to apologize for your command of our human tongue, Suppose you tell Doc here just what the problem is."

"Certainly," tinkled Jjarja. She swayed toward Jeff, who trembled visibly. "I am told you are a specialist in the repair of the dental area of the body."

"Body?" said Jeff. "Oh yes. No. Teeth. Never touch bodies."

"It is the teeth of which I am speaking."

"I try to dress them up a bit," babbled Jeff. "Nothing worse than the naked tooth—that is—are your teeth bothering you? Open wide—"

"No, no," murmured Jjarja, like some gentle woodwind distantly piping in a forest glen. "It is not my teeth but what you would call a tooth of my Asona."

"The point is," broke in Lyse, "she wants you to fix one of the big aliens' teeth, doc. Do you think you can do it?"

"What? Oh. I don't see why not," said Jeff, relievedly switching his gaze to the captain. "Merely a matter of technique. Of course I'd have to look at the—uh—Asona, first."

"His name is Aloba," sirened softly Jjarja.

"Well, you go ahead, then, doc," said Lyse, with a relieved note in his voice. "Take as much time as you want. I understand this Aloba has gone back to hide himself in the hills. You'll be gone a number of days. Miss Jjarja here will guide you to him. When you're ready to return, just give us a call on your belt phone, and we'll send a runabout after you."

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"I see. Thanks," said Jeff.

"You'll have to go on foot because you'll be searching for Aloba through the jungle of the hills. A ship wouldn't help you."

"Fine," said Jeff. "All right." He turned to go.

"Doc, for cripe's sake," said Lyse. "That's the door to my chart closet."

"Sorry," said Jeff, and blundered out the other way.

"This way," said Jjarja, some hours later.

"Uh," said Jeff. "Miss Jjarja, maybe you better walk beside me, instead of leading the way."

"You would prefer that, Jeff-er-ey?"

"Much," said Jeff, closing his eyes. "Are you back beside me now—oops!"

"The trail is narrow," explained Jjarja, in dulcet tones. "If we walk side by side, we cannot help touching each other like that. Does it disturb you to be touched?"

"Who, me? Of course not. Say, aren't we almost there?"

"We have yet some way to go. We have only been traveling half a day and I am not even sure that Aloba will be where I think he will. He has run away in great shame."

"Shame?"

"The tooth of his I desire you to mend. He has two long teeth. One is broken."

"Long teeth?"

"What do you call them?" Jjarja pursed her lips in pretty thoughtfulness. "Tusks?"

"Oh, a tusk."

"That is it. But do not be disturbed. If he is not at the first clearing, we can go on in the morning. I will make us a fine hammock of creepers. We will be very warm together."

"*No!*" cried Jeff, in sudden panic.

"But we will," insisted Jjarja.

"No! I mean—I mean I want my own hammock. You can have yours. I'll have mine."

"You are strange," said Jjarja.

They reached the clearing and stopped for the night. Jjarja made two soft roomy hammocks of creepers and suspended them between handy trees. Jeff tossed for a while feverishly; but finally fell off into sleep. The next morning they took up the trail again. Jjarja, from certain signs she had discovered around the clearing, was certain that they would come up with Aloba at the next one.

"Look," said Jeff. "How come he's running away, anyhow?"

"As I told you yesterday," said Jjarja, "he is ashamed. Being an Asona, poor fellow, he is very susceptible to shame."

"Susceptible?"

"You do not know about my people and the Asona?" said Jjarja. "I should perhaps explain. Aloba is a dear, and very intelligent. But he goes to pieces easily. Asona are that way. That is why we pair off with them at an early age, to help

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them out, and soothe them when they are upset."

"Oh?" said Jeff. "And what do they do for you in return?"

"Oh, they solve problems and things," said Jjarja. "They have very good memories and they are good at puzzles and questions. Now *my* people are very strong and capable in the fields of emotions. We are perhaps what you might call experts."

"For example?"

"Oh," said Jjarja. "Now take yourself."

"Me?" squeaked Jeff. "What about me?"

"Well, you are so obviously unhappy. It is easy for me to see that you have run away from some emotional situation and are determined not to face it."

"Nonsense! Certainly not! I don't know what gave you such a crazy idea, but—"

"Oh, I intuit it," said Jjarja.

"Well, you intuit wrong!" cried Jeff. "I never was so happy in my life. Emotional situation! I don't have any emotional situation. And if I did I wouldn't run away from it. And furthermore—what are you doing?"

"You will sit down here, please," said Jjarja, pulling him down on a soft carpet of moss at the foot of a huge creeper-hung tree alongside the pathway.

"What for? What—now what are you doing?"

"I am rubbing the back of your neck with my fingers. Lean your head back, please."

"Lean back—" Jeff felt the back of his head come to rest against something soft and yielding. "No!" he cried in panic, trying to straighten up.

"Yes, yes," crooned Jjarja, pulling him back down. "Just lie back for a little while. Do my fingers feel good on your neck? Don't answer, just lie still. Ah, how I enjoy doing this for you. You are so kind to let me do it."

"But—but—"

"There . . . there . . . just lie still. Do the fingers warm your neck? Gently . . . gently . . ."

"But—"

"Gently . . . gently . . ."

"—Where am I?" demanded Jeff, blinking and looking around him.

"We are almost to the clearing where Aloba will be," replied Jjarja's voice. He turned his head to stare down at her. They were marching through the path again, somewhere in the jungle of the foothills. The sun was considerably farther along in the sky than it had been when he had last seen it. In fact it now seemed about early afternoon.

"What happened?" demanded Jeff.

Jjarja giggled. Jeff broke out in a cold sweat.

"What happened?" he cried.

"You were upset," said Jjarja, softly. "I soothed you."

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"You soothed me so well I've been walking in an unconscious haze for six hours?" yelped Jeff.

"Oh yes. We are experts."

Jeff opened his mouth, but no words came out. He had no words *to* come out.

They went across a little ravine and up a slope, and over the crest of the slope—and emerged into the clearing Jjarja had promised. It was a large, comfortable clearing, with a little creek tinkling through it and downy with moss. At its far end an enormous creature, from the rear view *exactly* resembling an elephant-sized sheep dog, was standing with its head buried in a curtain of creepers.

"There he is!" cried Jjarja, joyfully. "Come Jeff-er-ey—" and she led the way up to the creature. "Aloba! I've found you."

"I know," replied the creature, in a voice muffled by the creepers. "Go away."

"But it's just me—just your Jjarja," crooned that young lady. "And I've brought a nice human to help you."

"I don't want any help," replied Aloba, without moving. "I'm beyond help. Go away. I think I'm going to commit suicide." After a second, he added: "And take that human with you."

"But he's a dentist," protested Jjarja. "His name is Jeffrey Willoughby, and he can fix you up if you'll let him."

Jeffrey tapped Jjarja on the shoulder and whispered in her ear. Pointing at the Asona, he hissed: "How come he's talking in English?"

"Why shouldn't I talk in English?" retorted the unmoving Aloba. "I heard that. Or Sanskrit or Lbbrinian?"

"What's Lbbrinian?" asked Jeff.

"Never mind. You'll find out someday," muttered Aloba. "I can talk any language. I can do anything. If I try, that is."

"Now, Aloba," coaxed Jjarja, "it was silly of you to run off and hide. You'd think a broken tooth was the end of the world."

"Well, I look hideous, don't I?" demanded Aloba, amongst the creepers. "People hide their snickers when they look at me."

"They do not!" said Jjarja.

"Oh yes they do. I know. Or else they pity me. I can't stand pity. That's the final blow."

"The Asona are very proud," explained Jjarja to Jeff.

"It's not pride, it's sensitivity—the other side of the coin of great intelligence. I am a genius, human. All we Asona are. That's why we've let Jjarja's people have all the contact with your race. What? Expose ourselves to your rude natures? Certainly not."

"But Aloba," said Jjarja. "The nature of Jeff-er-ey is sensitive, like your own."

"Nonsense," mumbled Aloba. "Utterly impossible."

"Please turn around," said Jjarja.

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"He will snicker."

"I will not," said Jeff. "What you don't realize—uh—Aloba, is that I am a professional where teeth are concerned. I am used to seeing teeth in all sorts of shape."

"You won't snicker?"

"Never," said Jeff, firmly. Aloba stirred. There was a rattling and a tearing of creepers as he faced about. Jeff blinked. This end of him was almost identical with the other. The faint glimmer of two large brown eyes peeked through the tangle of white curls and a couple of elephantine tusks protruded. One of these was shattered and broken off near its base.

"Oh, the ugliness of it," moaned Aloba, faintly, closing his eyes.

"Hmm," said Jeff, stepping up to the Asona's great woolly head. "Will you get down a little lower, please?" Aloba knelt clumsily, bringing his head down to about the level of Jeff's chest. Jeff probed around the fur, found an upper lip. "Raise your lip, please." Somewhat to his surprise, Aloba did. Jeff palpated the root area. "Does that hurt? How did this happen?"

"Hurt?" said Aloba, in a somewhat surprised tone. "Oh, yes. But I'm not paying any attention to that, you know. It's the looks."

"And how did it happen?"

"I fell off a small cliff," said Aloba, in a bashful voice. "I was speculating, you see, on the future of humanity, and how it would effect us if we took any one of five paths of relationships. Graduated cooperation—"

"And you landed on this tusk?"

"Well, it got caught between a couple of boulders as I rolled down the cliff, and snapped off. The shock was extreme. Ruined, I thought to myself, ruined! I could never face another Asona again with this humiliating disfigurement; and what would I be without personal contact with my kind? A withered, useless branch of the race."

"Aloba has the third best mind on the planet," said Jjarja, proudly.

"Well, no, actually I'm tied for third place," said Aloba, faintly, closing his eyes again. "Oh, well, maybe it's better that way—I can more easily be spared. The table of ratings will not even have to be adjusted."

"Now don't talk that way!" scolded Jjarja.

"We might as well face facts," groaned Aloba. "Metake will have third place all to himself. He will probably throw the weight of his arguments on the conservative side. That means the end of you humans on our planet here, Doctor, incidentally. But what can one do? Que será, será."

"I beg your pardon?" asked Jeff, startled.

"Oh, that's Spanish," said Aloba. "I guess you don't speak it as well as I do. It means in English: what will be, will be. I am irretrievably ruined."

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"Nonsense," said Jeff. Aloba's eyelids flew open almost literally with a bang.

"How dare you!" he trumpeted, surging to his feet. "What? You have the audacity—"

"He didn't mean it that way!" cried Jjarja.

"Nonsense? To me—a tied third! And by a human! I never heard anything so—"

"I meant every syllable of it," said Jeff, firmly. "I can't replace your tusk, but I can provide you with a substitute no one will be able to tell from the original, without professional experience."

"Skebash!" gasped Aloba.

"No, really," said Jjarja. "He really can."

"!" said Aloba.

"I will stake," said Jeff, somewhat carried away, "my professional reputation on it."

"I still don't believe it," said Aloba. "Nothing will make me believe it. I have too much common sense . . . really, doctor? You mean you can actually . . . How?"

Jeff explained that he would have to send for a few things. He unhooked his belt phone and proceeded to do so. Back at the ship, Hokerman mournfully informed him from the dental clinic that everything he wanted would be sent out early the following morning.

It was too late to do anything that evening. Jeff retired to his hammock and dropped off to sleep early. His last waking memory was of Aloba and Jjarja sitting before a comfortable fire and discussing something or other in their own rather complicated tongue. It was one of those perfect nights of sleep when he seemed merely to blink his eyes once and then he was awake again and it was morning, with both him and the morning bright-eyed and promising.

About nine o'clock the runabout made its delivery, having homed in on the signal of Jeff's phone. It let down the materials and equipment he needed, by cable. It could just as easily have landed, but Aloba threatened to go into another tizzy at the thought of exposing his damaged countenance to any more eyes than had already seen it. Jeff got to work.

On Aloba's assurance that both tusks had been, for all practical and cosmetical purposes, identical, Jeff made a cast of the one good tusk remaining in the Asona countenance, and cast up an acrylic false tusk over a metallic core, arranged to give the false tusk weight and balance. Assured by Aloba that this imitation was a close twin of the original real thing, he proceeded with the operation.

There was some small argument about the anesthetic. Aloba wanted to induce his own anesthesia according to the custom of his race—that is, by autohypnosis. Jeff did not

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trust autohypnosis. Aloba did not trust Jeff's lyrocaine. It was finally, and very sensibly, decided to use both. Aloba lay down on his side, crossed his eyes for a moment, and announced himself ready. Jeff moved up to the area of the Asona's head with a hypodermic syringe and infiltrated the root area with one hundred c.c. of the lyrocaine. Supporting the tusk stub temporarily with a bracket he had designed the night before, he made his incision into the upper jaw, laid a flap and lifted out the remaining bit of tusk and root quite easily.

He had already prepared a metallic base. This he anchored to the bone of the upper jaw with vitallium screws which he had been assured by Aloba were most likely to be tolerated by the Asona body chemistry. He had already packed the cavity left by the extraction of the tooth root. He sutured the incisions he had made and it was all over.

"Hum," said Aloba, when informed of this fact. He got to his feet and went over to a large mirror Jeff had ordered out and hung from a nearby tree. The Asona looked at himself.

"I look lopsided," he said.

"Here," said Jeff. He came up with the false tusk. "Now this will go onto the new base. Only we'll have to wait—"

"No," said Aloba.

"We can't put that much strain on that area so soon—"

"I want to see what it looks like."

"No."

"Yes," said Aloba.

After a rather spirited argument, Aloba won his point. Jeff lifted the false tusk; and, while Aloba held his head rock-steady, he screwed the threaded inner socket in the tusk's end onto the threaded bolt within the new base.

"Now there," said Jeff, supporting the tusk, as Aloba looked at himself in the mirror.

"It's twisted off to one side," replied Aloba.

"I didn't screw it as tight as you will later," said Jeff. "Besides, there will be minor adjustments to make. Naturally. However—"

"All right," said Aloba. "Take it out." Jeff unscrewed the tusk, and laid it aside. Aloba let out a whistling sigh of relief.

"Now, there you are Doctor," he said. "While you have done nothing *I* could not have done—given, that is, the time, the materials, the experience, et al—the fact remains, I would not have done it. I would no doubt have gone into seclusion, followed by a nervous breakdown, rapid decline of mental powers, and eventual collapse and death. One of the qualities of the Asona is to recognize our own limitations; and Doctor, like all the others, I am a veritable bundle of neuroses."

"Well, now—" began Jeff.

"Please! No contradictions, polite or otherwise. I know whereof I

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speak. Back to the matter at hand—you have performed a noteworthy action, performed a valuable service. A certain portion of the reward appertaining will, of course, be my voice in the Asona arguments in the favor of liberalism and humanity. More than that, however, I am willing now to engage in some face-to-face talks with your Captain, or other authorities of your race. I believe we can be of use to each other."

"Well . . ."

"You will be surprised at what we Asona have to offer. And now—about this little problem of yours."

"Problem?" stuttered Jeff.

"Certainly. It is a very Asona-like one; and one for which we Asona have long known a solution. You humans provide yourselves with any number of mechanical gadgets. We Asona, being more perceptive and capable, have merely provided ourselves with a single, all-purpose device in a member of Jjarja's race apiece. We are each assigned one of them at birth, and it would amaze you to know what unlimited usefulness they possess. Jjarja, of course, is mine; and in reward for what you have done for me, what I have to suggest is this: . . ."

Pat Dirksen sighed. It was a very heartfelt, satisfied sigh. She relaxed in Jeff's arms, gazing out through the copter windows at the familiar, friendly stars of the night sky as seen from midwestern North America, Earth, during the summer months.

". . . What happened?" she murmured, a little dazedly.

"I happened," said Jeff.

"No, I mean to make you so different."

"Oh, well," said Jeff. "Space travel—foreign associations. In a word, experience."

"But I still don't understand either how you got back so quick. You told me how you signed up and about this Asina—"

"Asona."

"Asona," Pat corrected herself. "But I still don't see—"

"That was part of the reward. He arranged for me to be let out of the Service again. Since the enlistment officer had played safe by giving me only a temporary appointment, it wasn't hard."

"Part of the reward?" said Pat. "What was the other part?"

"Nothing important."

"But I want to know."

"Well," said Jeff, "I don't know if I can describe it to you. He gave me something of his that was rather valuable. Naturally, I couldn't keep it. I hung on to it for a couple of weeks and then gave it back."

"But what *was* it?" said Pat.

"Oh, just a native gadget."

"A native gadget?"

"A native gadget."

"Why," demanded Pat, "do you smack your lips when you say that?"

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Joan Vatsek is a Hungarian who was born in America and educated in Canada in order to be a teacher in Egypt. As a result of all this, she speaks with a faint accent which Americans consider Hungarian and Hungarians consider American. Her first writing was for Whit Burnett's well-remembered and never-quite-replaced magazine, Story; *and her stories have appeared in nearly every major slick—sometimes as a result of collaboration with her husband Robert Arthur, who last month recounted here the impossible dilemma of* Obstinate Uncle Otis. *Mr. Arthur's fantasies are frequently humorous; Miss Vatsek makes her debut in this field with a serious ghost story, at once in the grand old manner of romantic atmosphere and in the newer psychological manner which insists that only some need within the haunted can evoke a haunt.*

The Duel

by JOAN VATSEK

WHEN JANINE STOPPED TALKING, sometimes as now she seemed to stop breathing also, as if to listen. The silence came in through the walls of the old Virginia house and pressed itself between them.

"Are you sure this place isn't too lonely for you?" Laurence asked again.

"I'm all right, really I am," Janine said with a fleeting smile. "Stop worrying. Everything's fine. Besides," she added reasonably, "we had to come here. There wasn't anyplace else to go, was there, now that we've spent all our money on me? I mean was there, darling?"

"No," Laurence agreed after a brief pause. "But I'd forgotten how isolated it was. If you think—"

"It's fine. It's a wonderful old house. Perhaps I'll even try my painting again."

She turned to gaze through the window, her slender arms resting on the sill. It was a high window, and round, like a porthole. From it there was nothing to be seen but woods, stretching away unbroken up the hills to the west.

After a while, her mouth constricted, she turned brightly toward him again.

"You'll have lots of ideas here," she said. "And I'll try to let you alone when you're writing. Really."

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She came gracefully toward the kitchen table where he was sitting, resting. While he went on with the unpacking, she managed supper. It came out of cans, but she served the food on fine china set on white damask cloth. She had unpacked and washed the china first of all, while Laurence got sheets and blankets out and made their bed and set the kitchen in working order.

They were surrounded by unpacked boxes in the dining room, but the good dishes were all aglow with pastel color and gold, and Janine glanced at them from time to time, satisfied.

She brought with her always this touch of luxury. It was a part of her being, a part of the aura that made her a unique and lovely woman.

Her gaze drifted around the room, uncarpeted and bare, and hesitantly to the rooms beyond, in which their apartment furniture would leave echoing spaces.

She avoided looking at the windows now that the blue dusk was sifting down into the solitary valley.

The house was all that remained of an old Virginia estate. It had been left to Laurence by his father, who had gone bankrupt in gentlemanly fashion a generation earlier, raising thoroughbred horses. The acres that surrounded the house had been long since sold. The house and the grounds around it were unsalable; it was too remote. So now, after being away from it since his boyhood, he had returned.

Half hidden in the long grass behind the house one could still find the remains of stables and slave quarters—tumbled foundation stones and unexpected pits.

A stream ran through the far part of the field, which could be crossed on a homemade plank bridge, and on the other side of the stream was an old burying ground with stones half sunk in the earth and hidden by weeds and grass. Beyond the forgotten headstones a tangle of woods had taken over.

In the evening silence they could hear the gurgling of the stream more loudly than when they had been busy with unpacking.

For an instant Laurence caught from Janine, from the tilt of her head and her look of vague dread, the ominous undertones of the gurgling water over stones. He sensed too the eeriness for her of the mist rising from the stream, which he had been accustomed to from childhood as part of a summer evening.

"We'll leave as soon as we have a little money," he promised flatly into the silence and the holding of her breath.

"Good," she whispered.

Later in the big bed she lay shivering beside him.

"Cold?" he asked. "Come closer."

"I'm fine," she denied. "Just sleepy. Goodnight, Laurence."

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"Goodnight, my darling."

She watched the moonlight stalk with grim shadows across the uncurtained room and fall across the counterpane. With a fierce intake of breath she rolled away from it, toward her husband, with superstitious dread remembering that moonlight must not shine upon one's bed.

"I can't sleep," she whispered desperately. "Cover the window, Laurence—cover the window. Keep the moon out. Please keep the moon out!"

In an instant he was wide awake and half across the room. He hung his robe over the curtain rods and said in an ordinary voice, "Better, Janine?"

"Better," she said, relaxing. "Much, much better. Thank you, darling."

"Can you sleep now? Want your eau de cologne? Anything?"

"No, dearest," she said with a low laugh, now that she was safe again in the darkness. "Just come back and let me put my arms around you, and we'll both drift off."

By the end of the week their belongings were all put away, the furniture arranged, the curtains hung. Their nearest neighbor was a farmer a mile away. Laurence hired one of his sons to cut the lawn, and his daughter, Trisa, a girl of seventeen, to come in for daily straightening and housecleaning. He and Janine drove to town twice a week to get groceries, and their mail and milk was delivered.

Everything had settled down to an orderly routine, and Laurence began to work again regularly. Janine kept to her promise. She no longer sought excuses to interrupt him; she brought his lunch on a tray and left it at his door.

Late one afternoon he went downstairs. It had been raining steadily all day long; he had scarcely seen Janine. He found her in the living room sitting cross-legged on the old Oriental rug before the fireplace.

It gave him a momentary start to see her there. How often he'd sat like that himself as a boy, while his mother read to him of Robin Hood and King Arthur's knights, and a fire crackled on the hearth. But there was no fire now, only a few cold ashes.

Janine did not hear him but remained absorbed in something on the floor in front of her. In the strange half-light she looked more than ever like a Dürer drawing. She was not beautiful in the ordinary sense of the word: she was simply arresting and unforgettable.

Puzzled, he became aware of what preoccupied her. On the floor she had placed an old inlaid chessboard that had been in the house since he could remember. She had turned it over and on the polished back had placed a crystal wine glass, upside down.

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Two fingertips of her right hand rested lightly on the base of the glass. As he watched, the glass seemed to glide across the board of its own volition in slow, swooping arcs, carrying her hand with it.

"What are you doing, Janine?" he asked.

She started, screamed, struck the glass a sidelong blow and sent it rolling off the board to the floor.

"No, no!" she cried.

He came into the room carefully, as if someone were asleep.

"I startled you," he said. "Forgive me. I just couldn't imagine what you were doing."

"Oh," she said, collecting herself, her breath coming unevenly. She picked up the glass and put it back. He saw now that she had carefully traced the letters of the alphabet on the back of the chessboard in ink.

"Haven't you ever received messages this way?" she asked with pretended carelessness. "Mother and I used to do it by the hour, when I was a girl, before she died."

"Messages from whom?" Laurence asked, careful to keep his tone casual.

"Oh, from beyond," Janine told him, looking surprised that he needed an explanation. "Mother and I used to talk to Father this way, and he brought all sorts of odd friends. Mother said it was just like him—when he was alive he was always bringing home the strangest people."

"But Janine—" Laurence began.

"I suppose," Janine added, watching him, "you and the doctor would say it was just Mother's way of escaping reality."

Fleetingly he thought of Janine's mother, gallant and pathetic. Gently brought up, left with nothing when her husband drowned sailing on the Charles River, she had opened a boarding house for students. Somehow she had sent Janine to the best schools, instilling in her daughter her own dream of the day when Janine, with her beauty and intelligence, would make a splendid success of some undefined kind—as a singer perhaps, or an actress, or a painter.

She had died, worn out but serenely satisfied with her handiwork, shortly before Janine and Laurence married.

Janine was watching him now with a hint of challenge in her smile.

"Try it," she said. "This is a wonderful old house. It was built in 1690—think of all the people who have lived and died here since then. And some of them are still around. I don't know why some stay and some don't, but it's always that way. Try it and see if any of them will talk to you."

"All right," he said, and forced a smile. He dropped to the rug beside her and took her hand. It slipped away from him, so he picked up the board and put it in front of him.

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"Just place two fingers on the glass," she explained. "Relax and wait and when the glass moves, let it take your hand with it."

He did so, prepared when nothing happened to smile and suggest having an early dinner and seeing a movie. But as he waited with his fingers lightly touching the crystal, it was as if the unnatural stillness he had been aware of as he watched Janine were gathering again.

The glass began to move. He was not aware of any conscious muscular effort, but the glass slid in a smooth arc across the board to the letter N. It paused, then swept on to the letter O. From there it went back even more swiftly to N. To O once more. To N. To O. Then the glass with a violent jerk dragged his hand straight across the board and off the edge.

"No, no, no," Janine read out. "I guess he doesn't want to talk to you, darling."

With an effort remaining calm, Laurence took out a cigarette and lit it.

"Who doesn't want to talk to me, Janine?"

"Roderick Jamieson," she said. "Major Roderick Jamieson. He once lived here. I was just talking to him when you came in. He was killed during the Revolution, he told me, at the Battle of Yorktown. He's buried in the little burying ground out back. I'm going to look for his tombstone tomorrow."

Laurence caught his breath. He had left the grass long in the little cemetery, and hadn't told Janine it was there.

But she must have found it and scraped the moss off the marble stone that did have the name Roderick Jamieson on it, though no one in the family had ever known just who Roderick Jamieson was.

"I see," Laurence said, feeling a weight lowering on his shoulders.

"Of course you know, Janine"—he spoke as carefully as if to a child—"the glass is moved by your own unconscious muscular actions. And any message it might spell out comes from inside your own mind."

"Perhaps," Janine said. "But that doesn't make the message any the less real, darling. Because who puts it there? Answer me that!" Abruptly her manner changed. "Don't worry, darling. I've nothing to do and Major Jamieson is fun, that's all. He's so boastful of his exploits. According to him he's fought so many duels and made love to so many women!"

She gave a ripple of excited laughter.

"No one could believe *all* his stories. It drives him into a rage when I tell him he's making them up. Sometimes he flings the glass across the room."

To his surprise she leaned into his arms, against his chest. They could both feel his heart pounding.

"I love you," he said tensely, summoning her back.

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"I know." She turned to him and lifted her face to be kissed. Her lips were warm and yielding. There seemed to be no transition necessary for her. She could live in the real and the unreal world at one and the same time. He took her in his arms and held her convulsively, feeling her closeness for the first time in months.

"You've no idea," she murmured, "how furious this makes him."

He lay awake that night after Janine had fallen asleep and was breathing regularly, her breath soft and warm upon his cheek.

He racked his brains for something to interest her, to draw her away from this game with the board and the glass and the imaginary rival. And with anguish he recalled the happiness of their first four years together, when he and Janine had lived in a tiny apartment overlooking Washington Square, and he had written two books, both quite successful.

Janine had been so undaunted and gay about her own career, going the rounds of the Broadway theatrical producers' offices, carrying her scrapbook of notices praising her performances in summer stock productions . . . then the year slavishly studying art . . . the short-lived practical period in an advertising agency writing copy . . . the brief enthusiasm for avant-garde poetry, and the thin sheaf of verses, never published . . .

Then her repudiation of New York, her longing for the country and isolation. They had moved to New Hampshire for her sake, so that she could really paint. As for Laurence, he could write anywhere.

In the lovely old colonial house overlooking the ocean Janine had produced half a dozen creditable landscapes. After endless hesitation she had entered them in a local art show. When none of them received even an honorable mention, she had in unfeigned tedium put away her paints and canvases.

Then, during the long New England winter, had come the first of those spells of apathy which had led them to one specialist after another, in Boston, New York, Washington . . .

And now, their money gone, they were here.

Laurence tried to get Janine to call on people; she refused. They drove thirty miles to see the movies twice a week, until she balked and begged him to go alone.

She assured him she was happy. As if to prove it, she at last unpacked her paints and canvases and began some desultory sketching. He expected her to abandon them at any moment, but she did not. Instead, she became abruptly absorbed in her painting. She began work on a canvas which she would not let him see, which she made him promise not to look at until it was finished.

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Happy to see her occupied, though he knew she still used the board and glass daily, he went back to work. He determined to treat her preoccupation with the messages lightly, until she should have enough of it. He even asked about Roderick Jamieson from time to time, his manner jesting.

But Janine took no notice of the jesting, and answered as naturally as if Roderick Jamieson were real.

One Sunday when Janine was washing the fine china after dinner —a task she never left to Trisa— Laurence said casually that he was going for a stroll, and made directly for the little bridge and the burying ground on the other side. He found the stone, right at the edge of the cemetery where he remembered it. The long grass beside it had been trampled. Janine must have been there. But the moss on the headstone now made the name quite illegible. How could she have known? To satisfy himself, he scraped off enough moss to verify the letters JAMIE . . .

Monday he drove the fifteen miles to town alone for groceries. "Trisa, stay here until I get back," he told the sloe-eyed, sleepy farm girl in the kitchen. "If your mistress wants to send you home, find some excuse to stay. I'll pay you double when I get back."

In town he stopped at the local Historical Society, a musty room where a pleasant, elderly woman kept the records of the town and its environs, going back to pre-Revolutionary days.

After looking around in a happy fluster, for hardly anyone ever came, the librarian found a brief biography cut from some older record book and pasted into an album with other yellowed prints.

"Major Roderick Jamieson," she said. "I knew I remembered the name. He came from around here. A famous duelist, it says here, killed in action at Yorktown. Decorated by Lafayette."

So Roderick Jamieson had been real enough. But how had Janine known he was buried behind the house when the moss on the headstone was untouched? And certainly she had never visited the Historical Society—she had never been to town alone.

There was only one other possibility. Among the ancient books and papers in the attic, Laurence decided, she must have found some records that mentioned Roderick Jamieson. He had never come across any such reference himself, but then, it was years since he had been up there and he had never rummaged very deeply into the moldering old newspapers and letters that had gathered dust there for perhaps two hundred years.

But he put off checking in the attic, not admitting to himself that he was afraid he would find no record of Jamieson there.

"Roderick is growing fantastic-

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ally jealous of you, darling," Janine said one afternoon, as she swung idly in the hammock. Laurence had brought out some lemonade flavored with mint he had found in a patch run wild.

"Mmmm," he said. "Had a letter from my agent today. He likes the new book but he wants me to work on it some more."

"What a bore."

"It means we have to stay put for the moment."

"Oh, that. I wouldn't want to leave."

"You wouldn't?" he asked uneasily.

"No. It's delightful simply to have time. I've never known anything like this place for time. I could just drift along forever."

"Lotus eater," he smiled, relieved.

She turned to him a look full of mysterious sorrow. "Yes," she said. "I'm not fighting it any more. I'm an idle and useless woman."

"Janine, you're nothing of the sort."

"But I am." She started the hammock swinging by lacing her fingers into the ropework. Her fingers were strong, bone-strong. The nails were long and polished. She was always immaculately groomed. She spent hours in front of the little dressing table in the dressing room he had fitted up for her.

"You should have told me years ago," she said half-accusingly. "Roderick claims a woman doesn't need to be useful. At least not a woman like me. He says her only duty is to be ornamental."

"He does, eh?" Laurence was not the least bit amused. "What else does he say?" He sought to understand the new role she was playing.

"Oh, he talks interminably about himself, as I told you. He tells me about his duels and his love affairs. I accuse him of having the love affairs simply because he had such a zest for polishing off the husbands. He doesn't deny it."

"Did he use sword or pistol?" Laurence asked, watching her face closely without seeming to do so.

She hesitated. "He's a little bit vague about that—he doesn't specify what weapons he used. Once he went into a tantrum and wouldn't speak to me for days, when I suggested he wasn't always a gentleman about these 'duels.' When he came out of his miff, he informed me that he had been fabulous with his pistols, and that he had killed six men single-handed, before he was killed in action at Yorktown. He was only twenty-seven, and he seems, sometimes, ever so much younger than that—much younger than you've ever been, darling."

"Six men? All husbands?" he asked dryly. This was a familiar theme with Janine—only a new twist. She didn't really like husbands, or being a wife: essentially she wanted a state of romantic tension, indefinitely sustained.

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"Three or four were husbands," she said carelessly. "But when I ask him what became of the ladies afterwards—all presumably free to marry him—he distracts me by complimenting me on my eyebrows, or something equally silly."

"Why? You have very nice eyebrows," Laurence said. "I suppose he's in love with you?"

"Oh, madly. He spends a lot of time brooding over how he can manage a duel with you. It's a great frustration to him not to be able to fling a glove in your face."

"He might fling the glass," Laurence suggested.

"That's not bad, darling," she said, as though she had not expected so much wit from him. "I'll suggest it. Would you like to see what he looks like?"

"See what he looks like?" He was momentarily startled.

She took him by the hand and led him into the living room. On an easel by the window was the canvas she had never let him see. Now, as she removed the covering and turned the picture toward him with the smile of a mischievous child, he understood.

It was the head and shoulders of a young man. His blond hair was long, and it curled down over his ears and to his collar. His face was thin and aristocratic, his lips twisted in a slight smile that might have been pleasing except for his eyes.

His eyes were an intense blue that was almost black. They seemed to catch and hold Laurence's gaze as if he were giving some command. There were depths to the painted eyes, depths of darkness, and when Laurence looked into the eyes, he saw that Janine hadn't painted Roderick Jamieson smiling.

It was undoubtedly the best thing she had ever done.

"It's superb," Laurence exclaimed. Then, trying to appear unconcerned, "So this is Major Roderick Jamieson."

"He says it's a perfect likeness"—laughter bubbled on Janine's lips—"except that it doesn't make him handsome enough. I told him his insufferable vanity begins to bore me."

"You must try another oil," Laurence said, choosing his words. "This is really very fine."

"Perhaps I will." Abruptly she covered the picture. Her voice was flat and uninterested. "It was fun."

That evening after Janine was asleep, Laurence wrote at last to the doctor in Washington who had treated her:

Janine's neurosis in this lonely place has taken a new turn. She spends her time dreaming. She has imaginary conversations through a homemade ouija board. She seems to be going gently

His pen tore through the sheet of paper, penetrating to the green blotter beneath. He burned the letter over the kitchen stove.

"Roderick says I should leave

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you," Janine said at breakfast, yawning and smiling at him. "He claims you don't understand me. He says you don't believe a word of what I tell you about him, and that you think I am going mad. Do you?"

Laurence concentrated on stirring his coffee, not trusting the expression of his eyes. His hands trembled. Had Janine watched him struggling with the letter, seen him burn it, guessed its contents?

"He does, eh? What else does he say?"

"Oh, never mind him, he's always making up things," she shrugged. She got up and kissed him. The rest of the day she put herself out to be sparkling, gay, witty—and she refused to be drawn back to Roderick Jamieson.

That night Laurence woke and found she had stolen downstairs. He got out of bed and crept down the stairs to the living room, where he paused in the doorway, drawn back and hidden by darkness.

Janine had lit a fire with a bit of paper and some kindling wood. This was the only light in the room. She was laughing and talking to herself, and the glass lay idle by the board.

He could make out no word of what she was saying, for she was speaking in a voice so low it sounded almost like someone else talking. The faint murmur could even have been the wind. But he could see her lips moving and her eyes shining with an animation she had not displayed for a long, long time. Unlike her pretense of gaiety all day, this was genuine.

She was dressed in a diaphanous nightgown and matching loose robe. It had big sleeves tight at the wrist, and it was closed at the throat with a blue ribbon. Once she caught at her throat with a look of confusion, as if someone there beside her had reached up to unfasten it.

Then she said something teasingly, shaking her head from one side to the other in negation.

Laurence had a premonition that she was about to rise and turn, so he went stealthily to bed, his heart throbbing and his head aching intolerably.

Janine came drifting back a few moments later, all her languor returned. As she lay beside him he could feel her exhaustion.

Whatever it had been, it hadn't been play-acting. It had taken a lot out of her.

In her sleep, later, she spoke. "Run! Run! Run!" she whispered. Then she gave a little moan and her head fell sideways on the pillow.

Laurence wrote the doctor the next morning, telling him the whole story, and not trusting the letter to Trisa, mailed it himself.

The doctor wrote to bring Janine at once for further treatment. He reminded Laurence sternly that he

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had been unwilling to let Janine go: he had not considered her cured. Laurence had asked desperately for advice; the doctor gave none. He said simply to come to Washington at once.

Laurence spent an hour staring at his bank book. He did not need to open it to read the figures.

He looked out the window at Janine. Around the house was a smooth carpet of lawn, but she preferred always to walk in the long grass, rustlingly, on the other side of the stream. Sometimes she vanished for hours in the woods. Did she meet Roderick Jamieson there?

He started, his fists clenched. Was her nonsense infecting him too? Yet it was true that she acted as though she had a lover.

He had never seen her so lovely. An inner wholeness seemed to possess her whole being. She was no longer torn apart as before by self-questionings, self-accusations, and abortive ambitions that were soon dispelled and left her limp and defeated.

She walked proudly now, almost with arrogance, and there were none of the nervous gestures and starts and stops that had marked her earlier illness.

He got out the doctor's letter to answer it, put it away again hopelessly, and began working, shutting out from his mind the seductive Virginia summer, the blue hot sky, the scent of honeysuckle, and his wife in its tangles, walking.

He worked all afternoon and sat down exhausted to the supper that Janine served by candlelight on fragile china, dreamily.

With a start Laurence noticed that she was drinking from the crystal glass she used for the ouija board, and that her hand was clasped around its stem almost constantly. She hardly ate, but drank lingeringly, her lips moving tenderly against the edge of the glass.

The wine, on top of a day of concentrated effort, made Laurence sleepy. He watched Janine through half-closed eyes.

She served brandied peaches in rose-crystal bowls, her every gesture fastidious and serene, as though she served a lover: but he knew that he was not the one she was thinking of.

As they went to bed, rain began to fall with a metallic patter on the copper roof gutters, and a soft whispering on the windowpanes. Thunder grumbled in the sky and lightning flashed, coming closer.

Janine fell asleep quickly and peacefully, but he was too weary. Sleep would not come. He turned and tossed, he lit cigarettes and put them out. He lay and stared into darkness illuminated at intervals by the reflected glare of lightning, and heard the storm draw nearer.

The shutter began to bang as the wind rose. Irritated, he got up to fasten it. As he reshut the window and turned back he saw Janine standing, facing him.

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He did not move or speak, frozen by her expression. She seemed to be looking directly at him with malevolent hatred.

After an electric moment she turned and went downstairs in the dark. He looked about for a flashlight, found none, and afraid to wait, gropingly followed her.

She did not turn even when he stepped upon the two creaking stairs, one after the other, hard. Then he was sure she was walking in her sleep.

The front door was open. He followed her out, shivering in the slashing rain. Ahead of him, Janine seemed to feel nothing. Her hair and her diaphanous gown blew back in the wind as the fitful lightning revealed her.

Laurence thought of the pits and foundation stones left of the old slave quarters and stables, toward which she was going. However great the shock, he must wake her.

"Janine!" he cried, his voice blending with the keening wind. "Janine!"

She heard her name, stopped in mid-flight, and must have made out the motion of his hurrying form, just as he could see only the erratically elusive white gown.

"Wait!" he called imperatively.

"You're slow, Roderick!" she called back. Then she gave a ripple of excited laughter and triumph. "Catch me!" she cried, coquetry in her voice. Starting away from him, she began to run. "Run, run, run!" she called. He remembered the compulsive words of her dream.

He ran. But she fled before him lightly, skirting the dangerous pits with amazing surefooted speed. She cut across the fields and Laurence followed, already sure of her destination. She raced across the little bridge, perhaps remembering vaguely some tale that spirits could not cross a stream.

Safe on the other side, she laughed exultantly. There was now nothing between her and the tangled woods, in which she might hide from him all night. He was soaked to the bone, and so must she be. She would catch pneumonia.

"Janine!" he called desperately. "Wait for me!"

"Too slow, too slow!" she called back. But she paused an instant. Lightning flared across the sky. In the brilliant white light he saw Janine looking toward him, her lips parted, her eyes wide with what seemed like dawning recognition, her hair and her thin gown plastered to her by the rain.

Laurence took the planks in three flying strides. He must get to her before she started off again. He must—he stretched his arm toward her, and then it seemed as if a vicious hand had treacherously seized his ankle. He felt himself flying through the air as if lifted bodily, and as he plunged forward he could see the marble slab sunken and tilted in the long grass. By the

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flare of lightning he could even see the letters from which he had scraped away the moss:

JAMIE...

Then his forehead came down full force on the edge of the marble.

When Trisa, the hired girl, came the next morning, she found Janine crouched on the living room floor in her still damp nightgown, crooning to Laurence, whose body she had somehow dragged into the house and whose bloody head was cradled in her lap. In the cold fireplace was a half-burnt chessboard, and the pieces of a broken glass were on the hearth.

Janine looked up slowly as Trisa entered.

"He didn't love me," she said, in a voice so hoarse Trisa could hardly understand her. "He never cared at all for me. He never cared for any woman. He just wanted to kill. To kill!"

It was the last coherent sentence she ever spoke.

Watch for the May issue of

Venture

F&SF's exciting s f sister magazine features, in May:

THEODORE STURGEON—with a powerful novelet, "The Comedian's Children." *When Heri Gonza, the world's funniest man, set out to lick iapetitis, the whole world rooted for him. Except for a few diehards, that is, who had their own ideas about what was causing the frightening children's disease . . .*

ISAAC ASIMOV—with a hilarious puzzler, "Buy Jupiter!" *The price the aliens were willing to pay for Jupiter was more than fair. But why did they* want *it in the first place?*

ROG PHILLIPS—with a moving short novelet, "Ground Leave Incident." *To a young country couple on an isolated planet, a spaceship visit is a welcome event . . . They tried not to notice the eyes of the woman-hungry crew . . .*

ARTHUR C. CLARKE—with an entertaining tale about a "Cosmic Casanova." *Two months out on a solo galaxy scouting trip, a man can get pretty lonely. So the lovely alien Liala was—almost—all a man could ask for . . .*

Also, permanent features: Isaac Asimov's informative column on science-in-the news, Theodore Sturgeon's lively discussion of s f doings in the world of books. And many more exciting stories.

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The Science Stage

THE INFERNAL MACHINE, WHICH will have finished going off at the Phoenix by the time you read this, is more indebted to fantasy and science fiction than the average playgoer might suppose. Its first obligation, of course, is to the actors, who manage to keep the proceedings interesting for a good part of the evening; to the scene designer, who has devised generally effective settings on a low budget; and to the Phoenix Theatre itself, which has given the play an opportunity to be seen and heard in New York. And it owes a great deal to Sophocles, who told the story of Oedipus more than two thousand years before the French got around to it. It is by now fairly common knowledge that the wretched protagonist of this tragedy, in fulfilment of a prophecy made before he was born, killed his father, married his mother, and lived to suffer the tortures of the damned. To this ancient classic tale Jean Cocteau has added several modern improvements which we might have done without.

Cocteau has apparently read widely in modern magazines dealing with fantasy and has perhaps unconsciously adapted what he read to his own purposes. There is for example a scene in which the ghost of the slain King Laius tries to "get through" to his widow and a group of soldiers and manages at most to be faintly heard. There is a scene where the Sphinx and the Egyptian god of the dead, Anubis, discuss the Sphinx's job here on earth, and Anubis comments that the Sphinx's assumption of the appearance of a young girl is making her feel and think like one. You might think that Anubis and the Sphinx were aliens from Planet X152, Galactic System 4189 ZA. There is, for still another example, the scene where Oedipus reads in the eyes of Teiresias some of his own future. All these would have sounded strange to Sophocles. They sounded comfortingly familiar to me.

If Cocteau had limited himself to such modern ingredients as these he might still have had a good play. Unfortunately, in his effort to achieve a light touch, he has added several shallow clichés of modern literature and playwriting. Jocasta is at one moment a silly old woman lecherously eying every young man, the next moment a mother heartbroken by the loss of her son in infancy, and only rarely a suffering queen. Teiresias vacillates between being a stupid and stuffy old man and a prophet-priest

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in direct communication with the gods. Other characters show similar inconsistencies in mood and behavior. Oedipus, instead of being a young man doomed by Nemesis, is for a good part of the play a boring neurotic who suspects every one for the most trifling cause and rages for no good reason. In the bedroom scene with Jocasta he tackles Freud and succeeds in reducing that gentleman to absurdity. Cocteau should have made him a woman and put him into an adaptation of a play by Tennessee Williams, not Sophocles.

To add to the general unhappiness, there are numerous individual lines outstanding for their silliness. After Jocasta has learned of her relationship to her young husband and hanged herself, Oedipus steps on stage to announce that "She was romantic." Then his daughter, Antigone, an adolescent and not a child of four, appears to say in childish accents, "Mother doesn't move." I don't know whether M. Cocteau, who is I understand an immortal of the French Academy, is responsible for these master strokes or whether the credit belongs to his adapter. May God have mercy on the guilty man's soul.

To my mind June Havoc was too young-looking and attractive to be a properly middle-aged queen, but did manage to lend interest to the part. Earle Hyman was fine as the ghost of Laius and Philip Bourneuf as Teiresias, the High Priest. Joan McCracken, as the Sphinx, gracefully managed a kittenish role and spouted some purple prose without blushing. Jacob Ben-Ami, costumed in an incredible collection of rags, was effective in his two minutes on stage. John Kerr, as Oedipus, was more peevish than tragic. But the script, which in the first act portrayed him as a young man in a gray flannel toga, was largely responsible. Even Claude Dauphin looked foolish in a pretentious filmed prelude and interlude which added nothing to the entertainment or artistic values of the evening.

We can still be grateful to the Phoenix for presenting us with this sample of modern drama in an experimental mood. As every young man should know in this scientific age, even an experiment with a negative result can be useful.

THE INFERNAL MACHINE, *by Jean Cocteau in a new adaptation by Albert Bermel, presented by the Phoenix Theatre, directed by Herbert Berghof, scenery by Ming Cho Lee, costumes by Alvin Colt, lighting by Tharon Musser, starring June Havoc and John Kerr.*

WILLIAM MORRISON

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Since Sputnik moved us into the Space Age, many new readers have turned to science fiction to see what further technical marvels s.f. is prophesying for the immediate future. Here Mr. Stanton obligingly offers a survey of those wonders that await you on the domestic level. Are you feeling strong?

Over The River To What's-Her-Name's House

by WILL STANTON

GARTH WAS TIRED WHEN HE GOT home from the office. "Mag?" he called. It was the afternoon for his wife's appointment with the Budget Counselor, but she might have gotten home early. "Mag?" There was no answer. Oh rats, he thought.

Then he tried to think of three beautiful things to combat the irritant thought. I am rich, rich, rich, he thought, wealthy in material possessions and in culture and in things of the spirit. He poured a bowl of marbles on the floor and took off his sandals. Then he sat in the contour-lax chair and picked up the marbles with his toes—first the left and then the right and then the left and dropped them in the bowl. He could feel the tension steal away—steal away home.

The fireside symphonium, activated by the movement of the chair, had commenced playing his favorite airs, and the vox humana was delivering calm yet inspirational utterances. He dropped the last marble in the bowl and brushed his toes together reflectively. A drink would taste good.

He crossed the hobby area to the recreation area, and opened the concealed door to the alcove which housed the portable bar. He selected a glass from the safety holder and engaged the lemon peeler, but when he came to look for the muddler there was nothing in the muddler rack but a nyliform sheath. It was the case for the shears for disjointing frozen fowl. He checked the bar guest book to see if anyone had jotted down an explanation. There was none. Not one lousy word.

Garth took a deep breath and ex-

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haled slowly, stretching his arms above his head. There was nothing better for toning up the system and inducing calmness. Spring showers, he thought, summer flowers, falling leaves. He stepped to the mail hamper and pressed the audio unit.

"Hello there from the Trivet of the Month Club," said the voice. "Now stop worrying. Just because you forgot to send in your dues doesn't mean you're going to miss out on this month's surprise trivet."

"Oh brother," said Garth, "that's hitting too close to home." He had forgotten to send in his dues. Of course the *Offer of the Month Club Digest and Consumers' Report* had given Trivet only a 5A rating which wasn't much.

"We'll be seeing you," the voice was saying, "at the Triveteers' Annual Outdoor Brunch and Jamboree. Send in your reservations and while you're at it, include your news notes for the correspondents' page of Triveteria. We thought the boys did a bang-up job on the first issue. . . ." Garth flipped the switch. Many of his trivets were still stacked in the storage area. That was the heck of it.

He had been on the point of installing some new trivet shelves when this bonus book had come in from some place—all about how to build a cabinet to hold covers for lawn furniture. And then Mag had been elected regional secretary of the Furniture for Unesco League, and the lawn furniture had gone into that, and when he got around to looking for the muddler all he could find was the book and nothing was the way he planned it or where it ought to be. Things of beauty, he thought, joys forever. The glories that were Greece.

He was checking the rest of the mail when Mag came home. "Sorry I'm late," she said, "I had a long talk with Fike at the Spiritual Guidance Office."

"You were supposed to have an appointment with the Budget Counselor," he said.

"There was a conflict in his schedule." She took off her gloves. "Any special mail?"

"There was some," he said, "what do you mean, a conflict?"

"He had it," she said, "that's all." She looked across the hobby area to the bar alcove. "I guess I left the alcove door open."

"I left it open," he said. "When I started to fix a drink. I looked for the muddler and all I could find in the rack was the cover to the shears for that book, you know—about the lawn furniture?"

"I always try to keep the door closed," Mag said, "I think it improves the appearance of the room. But it certainly isn't important. Surely not worth arguing over."

Garth closed his eyes and rubbed his hands across his head. This action rested the eyes and stimulated the scalp and he tried to remember to do it several times a day. Once an hour would not have been too

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often. "How come you didn't see the Budget Counselor?"

"I was just saying there was a conflict in his schedule. He had an appointment this afternoon with his Domestic Relations Advisor."

"There was a board set up to eliminate these conflicts," Garth said. "If it isn't functioning properly—"

"It's functioning," she said, "but according to the Civic Efficiency Authority a certain amount of conflict is considered healthful and beneficial. About fourteen percent."

"I see, fourteen percent," he nodded. "That sounds about right—fourteen or fifteen—somewhere in there. Did I tell you there was some mail? An invitation to a cocktail party to discuss plans for the Beautify the Homes of the Community Kickoff Luncheon Drive? Or maybe it was the other way around."

"You're tired," she said. "What you need is a good old-fashioned sing." She reached in the pianomatic and dialed the selections. "These are all your favorites." They sang "Bringing in the Sheaves" and "Over the Rainbow" and "Old Macdonald." Anyhow Garth did. Mag could never remember the words to "Old Macdonald." So while Garth sang, she kept time with her foot and murmured some of the phrases after him. "A moo-moo here and a cluck cluck there," she said, "I don't see how you keep them all straight. Here a quack, there a cluck, everywhere an oink oink—and it's so good for you, making animal sounds from time to time...." She was nodding her head in rhythm. "A group of professors at Yale discovered that. A baa baa here, and a cluck cluck there—can't you feel the tension drain away?"

"I missed a part in the middle," Garth said. "I don't know how it happened."

"You sang splendidly—just grand."

"It was crummy," he said. He got out of his chair and turned around and kicked it. "It seems like there ought to be more to life than stuff like that."

"That's just what Fike said, down at Spiritual Guidance. He feels we should join another religion. Now just a second—don't explode."

Garth walked around the chair and sat down again. "E-I-E-I-O," he said. "That's the only place where I'm on firm ground."

Mag leaned forward. "Now, don't explode—I know you'll say we can't afford another religion, but what Fike wanted to know—can we afford *not* to join another religion?"

"I thought Fike had another appointment."

"That was the Budget Counselor. Fike says the study of religion is in its infancy—"

"More than likely." Garth was rubbing his head and exhaling.

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"What I've been trying to think of just now is the name of a sick friend."

"Maybe I can help," Mag wrinkled her face into a thoughtful look. "Would you say he was tall or fat? Has he been ill long?"

"I don't know that he's ever been ill," Garth said. "It's the present you gave me, don't you see? For Clara Barton Day? A Sick Friend of the Month Club Gift Certificate. So if we don't want the subscription to lapse... It doesn't have to be one of my sick friends, of course, one of yours would do—"

"You silly," Mag said fondly, "that's all taken care of. They'll provide a sick friend if you don't have one."

"No point in changing the subject," he said. "The purpose of life is to have your sick friends get well and not go rummaging around looking for new people that are sick just because you don't know them —"

Mag smiled and patted his hand. "Three good thoughts now . . ."

Yes, he thought, for God, for country, and for Yale. "There are institutions provided for these people."

"It would be nice if we had some popcorn, don't you think?" Mag reached into the audio unit and took out the mail.

"If a friend is sick," Garth said, "well and good. But if you think it's going to end there – Do you want the frozen redipopt?"

"Let's pop it ourselves, that's half the fun. Here's a reminder from the Holiday Death Toll Remembrance Committee..."

Garth wheeled out the Hostess-Helper, set the Chafe-All on top and plugged in the Pop-Master. "What kind do you want?" he said. "There's bleu-cheeze, old smokey garlic, ham 'n chive..."

"I think just the plain," she said.

"That's the most fun of all," he said. "I'll get the Likwid-But-R from the freezer."

"I can taste it already. Garth, here's another notice from the Senior Citizens Re-Treat. If we take advantage of their plan . . ."

"No popcorn in the staples cupboard," Garth called. "I'll try the snack-shelf."

"If you retire at forty," she said, "we'll have an expectancy of seventy fruitful rewarding years."

"I've looked in the emergency shelf, the Parti-Bin, everywhere," Garth said. "There isn't any popcorn. I don't know what to think."

"You're tired," she said. "Would you like to sing some more?"

He sat down dejectedly. "I've tried to be a good provider. That's been my goal. Any time I ever bought popcorn or anchovies or a nice light wine, it made me feel capable—able to entertain friends and all. Now I just feel punk."

"You mustn't try to bury these irritant thoughts," said Mag. "You must bring them to the surface and destroy them."

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"There's popcorn in this house," he said, "that I know."

"Tomorrow we can rest all day," Mag said, "renew old acquaintances, take stock of ourselves."

"A well run home is like a fine watch," he said. "When I took that course in domestic inventory and management that's what everybody told me. Ha ha." He laughed bitterly. "Some watchmaker. Oh brother."

"Three beautiful thoughts," said Mag severely. "You think them now..."

"Yes," he said. Cool cool water. Bodies of water, lovely bodies. He couldn't decide how many thoughts these were. He thought of the Statue of Liberty.

"You feel better already," Mag said, "I can sense it. You know what the *Journal of Simplified Living* says—"

"No, I don't. I don't know where it is either. Talk that over with Fike. See if he knows where the popcorn is while you're at it. That's the crux of the whole thing. I don't know which way to turn in my own home." Peace, he thought, songs of childhood – happy birthday. He leaned down and picked up a marble from the floor.

"I've noticed a lot of those around lately," Mag said. "I don't know where they come from."

"I usually get them all picked up," he said, "with my toes."

Mag nodded. "I think that's fine."

"It eases the tension," he said. "I should have picked up this one too, but which foot?"

"Pick it up once with each."

"You're not going to ease any tension by begging the question," Garth told her. "Thunderation." He stared at the marble. A place in the country, he thought, a cluck cluck here, a quack quack there. More than likely it was the left foot. He sat down and took off his sandal. He took off the other one too. For a moment he stared at his toes, then reached back of him for the bowl of marbles.

"Well, butterfingers," Mag said jokingly, "I'll help you pick them up."

"Stand back," he said, "you get your own marbles." He picked up one with the left foot and dropped it in the bowl. Childhood memories, he thought, a Fourth of July parade, the band and the marching units. He dropped another marble in the bowl. All the organizations were there, marching along in fine style with the Civic Efficiency Authority in front. Their heads held high, they turned the corner at River Street and marched out on the new bridge—the unfinished bridge that arched the raging flood. He dropped a marble. Next were the Triveteers...

"I don't see why you say 'splash' every time you drop a marble," Mag said.

"Get me a bottle of Sulfa-Cola."

Mag brought him the bottle.

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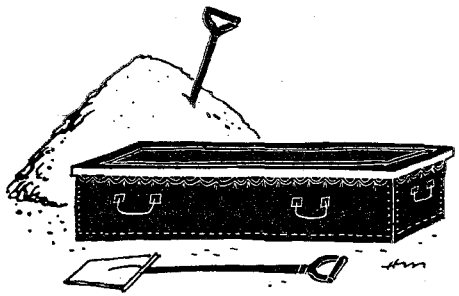
"Here you are, you look thirsty."

"Pour it in the bowl," he said. He waited until she had finished. "That's fine. What was that group that your mother – well, never mind." He dropped a marble. The next marching unit was the Past Vice Presidents of the Assembled Women's Clubs and Mag was in the lead. She strode on proudly, waving a banner and carrying the answers to all questions tucked under her arm. He picked up a marble.

Mag gazed fondly at her husband. The expression on his face was happier than she could remember.

A faint shiver passed over her. "Garth, did you change the thermotrol? It seems cool all of a sudden –almost clammy."

Garth held his foot high. "Splash," he said.



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This issue opened with Robert Sheckley's glimpse of the near future of television. Now Brian Aldiss takes a look at the more remote interstellar future of movies — by then solidly three-dimensional. The disillusioned moral of both stories seems to be, "Plus ça change . . ." *Or, in view of the new added dimension: "Today's square is tomorrow's cube."*

Have Your Hatreds Ready

by BRIAN W. ALDISS

THE MIGHTY CREATURE WAS REELING. The hunter's last shot had caught it right between its eyes. Now, all fifty graceful tons of it, it reared up high above the treetops, trumpeting in agony. For a moment the sun, beautiful and baleful, caught it poised like an immense swan, before it fell—silent now, no more protesting—headlong into the undergrowth.

"And there lies another triumph for Man the Unconquerable, Man the Invincible," proclaimed the commentator. *"On this planet as on others, the stupendously horrible natural life finally bows out before the gigantic little biped from Earth. Yes sir, every one of these revolting, unnatural monsters will be slaughtered by the time—"*

But by this time, some bright boy had warned the projectionist of the new arrival who was now waiting to use the little editing theater. The projectionist, in a panic, cut everything. The 3D image vanished, the sound clicked out with a squawk. Lights came on, revealing Mr. Emile P. Wreyermeyer of Supernova Solids standing by the door with several of his more up-and-coming lackeys.

"Hope we didn't disturb you boys, Ed?" Mr. Wreyermeyer said, watching everyone hustling up to leave.

"Not at all, Mr. Wreyermeyer, we were just tinkering," Ed, (a mere assistant director) said, grabbing up his gear. "We'll wrap this one up tomorrow. Come on, boys, move fast!"

"I wouldn't like to think we'd interrupted," Mr. Wreyermeyer said blandly. "But Harsch Berlin here has something he seems keen to show us." And he nodded, not

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perhaps without an easy menace, at the lean figure of Harsch Berlin.

Two minutes later, the last humble shirtsleeved minion had fled from the theater, leaving the intruding party in occupation.

"Ed didn't seem in any hurry to leave," Mr. Wreyermeyer observed heavily, settling his bulk in one of the armchair seats. "Well, Harsch, my boy, let's see what you have to show us."

"Sure thing, Emile," Harsch said. He was one of the few men on the Supernova lot allowed to call the big chief by his Christian name; give him his due, he worked the privilege for all it was worth. He jumped now, with a parody of athleticism, onto the narrow stage in front of the solidscreen and smiled down at his audience. It consisted of some twenty-five people, half of whom Harsch knew only by first names. This company broke down roughly into four groups: the big chief and his yesmen; Harsch's own yesmen, headed by Tony Caley; a handful of boys from Story and Market Response Departments with their yesmen; plus the usual quota of hypnotic-breasted stenographers.

"Here's how it is, boys," Harsch began, trying to look disarming. "I've got an idea for a solid that has me knocked sideways, and I'm hoping and expecting it'll have the same effect on all of you. Now I'm not going to try and *sell* it to you —we're all busy men here, and for another thing, it sells itself. It's a great idea, at once original *and* familiar, at once homely *and* inspiring.

"In brief, the idea's this: I want to put over a solid that is going to give Supernova a terrific boost, because it's going to have our studios as background, and some of our personnel as extras. At the same time, it's going to pack colossal punch in terms of human drama and audience appeal. At the same time, it's going to be a profile of New Union, the busiest, biggest, excitingest, megapolitanist planetary capital in this neck of the galaxy."

Harsch paused for effect. Several members of his audience were lighting up mescahales, picking their noses, or talking to each other in whispers.

"I can see you're asking yourselves," Harsch said, smiling, "just how I intend to cram so much meat into one two-hour solid. O. K. I'll show you."

He raised one hand eloquently, as a signal to his projectionist, Harry Dander. There was no better man than Harry at his job; even Harsch had been known to acknowledge that on occasions. Directly his hand rose, a solid appeared in the screen.

It was the face of a man. He was in his late forties. The years which had dried away his flesh had only succeeded in revealing, under the fine skin, the nobility of his bone

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structure: the tall forehead, the set of the cheekbones, the justness of the jaw. He was talking, although Harry had turned off the sound, leaving only the animation of the features to speak for themselves. This was the kind of man, you felt instinctively, whose daughter you would like to marry. His countenance dwarfed Harsch Berlin.

"This, ladies and gentlemen," Harsch said, clenching his fists and holding them out before him, "this is the face of Art Stacker."

Now he had a reaction. The audience was sitting up, looking at each other, looking at Mr. Wreyermeyer, trying to gauge the climate of opinion about them. Gratified, without letting the gratification show, Harsch continued.

"Yes, this is the face of a great man. Art Stacker! What a man! He was known only to a narrow circle of men, here in this very studio where he worked, yet all who knew him admired and—why don't I come right out with it?—*loved* him. I had the honor to be his right-hand man back in the good old days when Art was boss of Documentary Unit Two, and I plan this solid to be his biography—a tribute to Art Stacker."

He paused. If he could swing this one on Wreyermeyer and Co, he was made, because if it boosted Art Stacker it was also going to boost Harsch Berlin. He had to play his hand carefully, watching the big boys in the armchairs.

"Art finished up in the gutter!" someone called out. That was Hi Pilloi, only a yesman's yesman.

"Yes, and I am glad someone brought that point up at once," Harsch said, carefully snubbing Hi Pilloi by not mentioning his name. "Sure, Art Stacker finished up in the gutter. He couldn't quite make the grade. This solid is going to show why. It's going to have subtlety. It's going to show just how much grit and know-how is needed to serve the public as *we* serve them—because, like I said, it's going to be a solid not just about Art Stacker, but about Supernova, and about New Union, and about Life. It's going to have everything."

The gentle face faded, leaving Harsch standing there alone. Although he was thin almost to the point of emaciation, Harsch perpetually consumed slimming tablets for the luxury of hearing his underlings refer to him as "gangling," which he held to be a term of affection.

"And the beauty of this solid is," he continued dramatically, "that it's already half made!"

With Harry sliding smoothly in on his cue again, images began to grow in the seemingly limitless cube of the screen. Something as intricate and lovely as a magnification of a snowflake stirred and seemed to drift towards the audience. It enlarged, sprouting detail, elaborating itself, until every tiny branch had other branches. It

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seemed, thanks to clever camera work, to be an organic growth: then the descending, slowing viewpoint at length revealed it to be a creation of concrete and stone and ferroline, molded by man into buildings and thoroughfares.

"This," Harsch pronounced, "is the fabulous city—*our* fabulous city —of New Union, as filmed by Unit Two under Art Stacker when he was at the height of his powers, twenty years ago. This solid was to be his great work; it was never completed, for reasons I will tell you later. But the sixteen reels of unedited tape he left behind as his greatest memorial have lain in our vaults here all that long time, until I dug them out just the other day.

"O.K. Now I'm not going to talk any more for a while. I'm going to ask you to sit back and appreciate the sheer beauty of these shots. I'm going to ask you to try and judge their undoubted value in terms of esthetic appeal and box office punch. I'm going to ask you to just relax and watch a masterpiece, in which I'm proud to say I had such a considerable hand."

The viewpoint was still sinking with all the leisure of a drowned man, below the highest towers, through the aerial levels, the pedestrian (human and non-human) levels, the various transport and service levels, down to the ground, the asphalt ground, embedded in which a convex glass traffic guide reflected in miniature the whole of that long camera descent from the skies. Then the focus shifted laterally, taking in the bright boots of a police officer.

Meanwhile, almost unnoticed, a commentary had begun. It was a typical Unit Two commentary, quiet, unemphatic, spoken in Art Stacker's own voice.

"On the seventy planets which occupy the insignificant corner of space inhabited by man, there is no bigger or more diverse city than New Union," the commentary said. *"It has become a fable to all men of all races. To describe it is almost impossible without descending into statistics and figures, and this is to lose sight of the reality; we ask you to come exploring the reality with us. Forget the facts and figures: look instead at the streets and mansions and, above all, at the individuals which comprise New Union. Look, and ask yourselves this: how does one find the heart of a great city?"*

New Union had grown over the ten islands of an archipelago in the temperate zone of the planet Keirson, and spread to the nearby continent. Five hundred bridges, a hundred and fifty subways, sixty heliplane routes and innumerable ferries, gondolas and sailing craft interconnected the ten sectors. The camera swept over Harby Clive Bridge now, hovering before the first block beyond the waterway. A young man was coming out of the block, springing down the outer

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steps three at a time. On his face were mingled excitement, triumph and joy. He could hardly contain himself. He could not walk fast enough. He was buoyed with exaltation. He was the young man you can find in any large city: a man about to make his mark, having scored his first success, confident beyond sense, happy beyond measure. In him you could see the fuse burning which had reached out to seventy planets and dreamed of seventy thousand more.

The commentator did not say this. The picture said it for him, catching the young man's strut, his angular shadow sharp and restless on the pavement. But Harsch Berlin could not stay silent. He came forward so that his figure bit its silhouette out of the solid in the screen.

"That's the way it was with Art," he said. "He was always digging around for what he called 'the exact, revealing detail.' Maybe that's why he got no further than he did: he drove us all crazy hanging around for that detail."

"These are just shots of a big city," Barnes from Story called up impatiently. "We've all seen this sort of footage before, Harsch. Just what does it all add up to?"

Barnes was a nobody trying to be a somebody; the boys in the back office spat when they heard his name.

"If you used your eyes, you'd see the pattern forming," Harsch replied. "That was how it was where Art was concerned—he just let the thing evolve, without imposing a pattern. Watch this coming shot now for pure comedy...."

Young lovers had come sweeping up a water lane in a powered float. They moored, stepped ashore, and walked arm in arm across a mosaic walk to the nearest cafe. Background music changed tempo; the focus of attention slid from the lovers to the waiters. Their smoothness of manner at table ("*Certainly, madam, I will bring you a fingerbowl at once*") was contrasted with their indifference when they were behind scenes, in the squalor and confusion of the kitchens ("*Joe, some old cow wants a fingerbowl; where the hell are they*?").

A close-up showed two elderly waiters passing through the intercommunicating doors between dining room and kitchen. One was going into the kitchen, one out. The one going in uttered with a wink this cryptic and sinister sentence: *"He's eaten it!"* A man at a nearby table, overhearing the words, dropped his knife and fork and turned pale.

"Get the idea?" Harsch asked his audience. "Art is digging down. He's peeling off strata after strata of this, the mightiest city of all time. Before we're through, you're going to see some of the filth he found at the bottom."

Hardly for a moment had he taken his lynx eyes off Mr. Emile

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P. Wreyermeyer, whose dead-pan countenance was partially hidden by wreaths of mescahale smoke. The big chief now crossed his legs; that could be bad, a sign perhaps of impatience. Harsch, who had learnt to be sensitive about such things, thought it might be time to try a direct sounding. Coming to the edge of the stage, he leaned forward and said ingratiatingly, "Can you see it building up yet, Emile?"

"I'm still sitting here," Mr. Wreyermeyer said. You could call it an enthusiastic response.

"Good!" Harsch said, turning briskly, "gangling" to his yesmen, raising a hand to Harry. The image died behind him, and he stood fists on hips, legs apart, looking down at the occupants of the padded seats, making his facial line soften. It was a triumph of deception.

"Those of you who never had the privilege of meeting Art," he said, "will already be asking, 'What sort of a man could reveal a city with such genius?' Not to keep you in suspense any longer, I'll tell you. When he was on this last consignment, I was just a fresh cub kid in the solid business, working under Art. I guess I learnt a whole lot from Art, in the matter of plain, solid humanity as well as technique. We're going to show you a bit of film now that a cameraman of Unit Two took of Art without him knowing. I believe you'll find it . . . kind of moving. O.K., Harry."

The solid was suddenly there. In a corner of one of New Union's spaceports, Art Stacker and several of his documentary team sat against junked oxygenation equipment, taking lunch. Art was perhaps forty-eight, a little over Harsch's present age. Hair blown over his eyes, he was devouring a gigantic *kyfeff* sandwich and talking to a pudding-faced youth with crew cut and putty nose. Looking round at the solid, Harsch identified his younger self with some embarrassment and said, "You got to remember this was shot all of twenty years ago."

"You sure weren't so gangling in those days, boss," one of his rooters in the audience called.

Art was speaking. *"Now Wreyermeyer has given us the chance to go through with this consignment,"* he was saying, *"let's not spoil it by being glib. Anyone in a city this size can pick up interesting faces, or build up a few snappy architectural angles into a pattern, with the help of background noise. Let's try to aim for something deeper. I want to find what really lies at the heart of this metropolis."*

"Supposing it hasn't got a heart, Mr. Stacker?" the youthful Harsch asked. *"I mean—you hear of heartless men and women; could be this is a heartless city."*

"That's just a semantic quibble," Art said. *"All men and women have hearts, even the cruel ones. Same with cities—and I'm not*

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denying New Union isn't a cruel city in many ways. People who live in it have to fight all the while; you can see it in our line of business. The good in them gradually gets overlaid and lost. You start good, you end bad just because you —oh, hell, you forget, I suppose. You forget you're human."

"That must be terrible, Mr. Stacker," young Harsch said. *"I'll take care never to get that way myself. I won't let New Union beat me."*

Art finished his sandwich, looking searchingly at the blank young face blinking into his. *"Never mind watching out for New Union,"* he said, almost curtly. *"Watch out for yourself."*

He stood up, wiping his big hands on his slacks. One of his lighting crew offered him a mescahale and said, *"Well, that's about tucked up the spaceport angle, Art. What sector do we tackle next?"*

Art looked round smilingly, the set of his jaw noticeable. *"We take on the politicians next,"* he said.

The youthful Harsch scrambled to his feet. Evidently he had noticed the camera turned on them, for his manner was noticeably more aggressive.

"Say, Mr. Stacker, if we could clear up the legal rackets of New Union," he said, *"at the same time as we get our solids—why, we'd be doing everyone a favor. We'd get famous, all of us!"*

"I was just a crazy, idealistic kid back in those days," the matured Harsch, at once abashed and delighted, protested to the audience. "I'd still to learn life is nothing but a kind of coordination of rackets." He smiled widely to indicate that he might be kidding, saw that Mr. Wreyermeyer was not smiling, and lapsed into silence again.

In the screen, Unit Two was picking up its traps. The cumbersome polyhedron of a trans-Magellanic freighter sank into the landing pits behind them and blew off steam piercingly.

"I'll tell you the sort of thing we want to try and capture," Art told his team as he shouldered a pack of equipment. *"When I first came to this city to join Supernova, eight years ago, I was standing in the lobby of the Federal Justice building before an important industrial case was to be tried. A group of local politicians about to give evidence passed me, and I heard one say as they went in— I've never forgotten it—'Have your hatreds ready, gentlemen'. For me, it will always embody the way that prejudice can engulf a man. Touches like that we must have."*

Art and his fellows trudged out of the picture, shabby, determined. The solid faded, and there before the screen stood Harsch Berlin, spruce, determined.

"It still doesn't begin to stack up, Harsch," Ruddigori said from his armchair. He was Mr. Wreyer-

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meyer's Personnel Manager, and a big shot in his own right. You had to be careful with a louse like that.

"Perhaps you don't get the subtleties, Ruddy, eh?" Harsch suggested sweetly. "The thing's stacking fine. That little cameo has just demonstrated to you why Art never made the grade. He talked too much. He theorized. He shot off his mouth to kids like I was then. He wasn't hard enough in the head. He was nothing more nor less than just an artist, Ruddy. Right?"

"If you say so, Harsch, boy," Ruddy said levelly, but he turned at once to say something inaudible to Mr. Wreyermeyer. The familiarity of it! Caught for a second off guard, Harsch glared stilettos at the studio chief; Mr. Wreyermeyer sat immobile as if made of stone, although now and again his throat bobbed frog-like as he swallowed.

Harsch made a brusque signal to Harry in the projection box. He would swing this deal on Supernova if he had to stay here all afternoon and evening plugging it. He blew his nose and slipped a slimming tablet into his mouth under cover of his handkerchief.

"Right," he said sharply. "You should have seen enough to grasp the general picture. Now we're going in for the kill. Are you story girls taking notes, down there?"

A babble of female assent reassured him.

"Right," he repeated automatically.

Behind him, Art Stacker's New Union was recreated once more, a city which administered the might of the growing Region and swam in the wealth of a gigantic planetary sweepstake: assembled here as the mind of Art Stacker had visualized it two decades ago, a city acting at once as liberator and conqueror to its multitudinous inhabitants.

Now evening was falling over its maze of concrete canyons. The sun set, the great globes of atomic light tethered in the sky poured their radiance over thoroughfares moving with a new awareness. Harry had dimmed down the original commentary, giving Harsch the opportunity to provide his own.

"Here it is, night coming down over our fabulous city, just as we've all seen it lots of times," he said briskly. "Art caught it all as it's never been caught before or since. He used to tell me, I remember, that night was the time a city really showed its claws, so the boys spent a fortnight padding around looking for sharp, broken shadows that suggested claws. The craze for significant detail again. Some of their pickings are coming up now."

The clawed shadows moved in, fangs of light bit into the dark flanks of side alleys. An almost tangible restlessness, like the noisy silence of a jungle, chittered across the ramps and squares of New

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Union; even the present onlookers could feel it. They sat more alertly in their seats and despatched an underdog to enquire why the air-conditioning was not working better. Mr. Wreyermeyer stirred; that must mean something.

Behind a façade of civilization, the night life of New Union had a primitive ferocity; the Jurassic wore evening dress. In Art Stacker's interpretation of it, it was essentially a dreary world, the amalgam of the homesicknesses and lusts of the thousand nations who had drifted to Keirson. The individual was lost in this atom-lit wilderness where thirty million people could be alone together within a few square miles.

Art made it quite clear that the thronging multitude, queuing for leg shows and jikey joints, were harmless. Living in flocks, they had developed the flock mentality. They were too harmless to tear anything of value out of the flux of New Union; all they asked for was a nice time. You could only really enjoy yourself by stepping hard on a thousand faces.

Art showed the hard-steppers. They were the ones who could afford to buy solitude and a woman to go with it. They drifted above the sparkling avenues in bubbles, they ate in undersea restaurants, nodding in brotherly fashion to the sharks watching them through the glass walls, they wined in a hundred little dives, they sat tensely over the gaming tables: and at the imperious signal of their eyes, there was always a serf to come running, a serf who sweated and trembled as he ran. That is how a galactic city runs; power must always remember it is powerful.

Now the scene changed again. The camera began to investigate Bosphorus Concourse.

The Concourse lay at the heart of New Union. Here the search for pleasure was tensest, intensest. Barkers cried their rival attractions, liquor flowed like a high tide, cinema vied with sinema, the women of the night were spiderishly busy.

Harsch Berlin could not resist putting a word in.

"Have you ever seen such realism, gentlemen?" he demanded. "Here are ordinary folks—folks like you, like me—just getting down to having a whale of a good time. Think what wonderful propaganda these shots are for our splendid city! And where've they been these last twenty years? Why, lying down in our vaults, neglected, almost lost. Nobody would ever have seen them if I hadn't hunted them up!"

Mr. Wreyermeyer spoke.

"I've seen them, Harsch," he said throatily. "For my money, they're too sordid to have any popular appeal."

Harsch stood absolutely still. A dark stain rose in his face. Those few words told him—and every-

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one else present—exactly where he stood. He stood out on a limb. If he persisted as he wanted to persist, he would rouse the big chief's anger; if he backed down, he would lose face, and there was not a man here who, for various reasons, would not like to see that. He was spiked.

In the solid behind Harsch, men and women queued tightly for admission to a horror show *Death in Death Cell Six*. Above them, dwarfing them, was a gigantic still of a man being choked, head down, eyes popping, mouth gaping. You could see his epiglottis. It was a masterpiece of realism. That show had actually been produced by Mr. Wreyermeyer himself in his younger days; Harsch had intended a pretty compliment about it, but now in his hesitation he let the moment slip.

"We needn't show all this sordid stuff, Emile, if you don't think so," he said, smiling as if in pain. "I'm just giving it a run-over to put the general idea before you. We'll —you'll settle on the final details later, naturally."

Mr. Wreyermeyer said nothing. He nodded his head once, neutrally. Ruddigori spoke up.

"You're too sold on Art Stacker, Harsch," he said kindly. "He was only a common bum with a camera, after all."

"Sure, Ruddy, sure," Harsch replied; he always knew when it was time to back away. "Haven't I just told Mr. Wreyermeyer here that this is sordid stuff? Our job after will be to pick the good bits out of the junk."

"Nobody could do that better than you, H. B.," Tony Caley called.

"Thanks, Tony," Harsch said, nodding cordially to him. Tony was his head yesman; the bastard was going to feel the ax afterwards for not giving better backing. Why, he'd not spoken till now, just sat there leering at the stenographers.

Art Stacker's city was emptying now. Crumpled mascahale packets, newspapers, tickets, programs, preventatives, bills and flowers lay in the gutters. The revelers, sick and tired, were straggling home.

"Now watch this!" Harsch said, putting force into his voice, clenching his fists, gangling. "This is *really* a human document. This is where Stacker *really* came off the rails."

A fog was settling lightly over Bosphorus Concourse, emphasizing the growing vacancy of the place. A fat man, clothes all unbuttoned, reeled out of a bordel and made for the nearest lift. It sank away with him, like a ball falling down a drain.

From St. Bosphorus Cathedral, two thirty sounded. Lights snapped off in a deserted restaurant, leaving on the retina an after-image of upturned chairs. One last prostitute clattered wearily home, clutching her handbag.

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Yet still the Concourse was not entirely empty of humanity. The remorseless eye of the camera hunted down, in sundry doorways, the last watchers of the scene. They had stood there, not participating, when the evening was at its height; they stood there still when the first milkman was stirring. Watching the crowd, watching the stillness, watching the last whore hobble home, they stood in their doorways as if peering from a warren. From the shadows, their faces gleamed with a terrible, inexpressible tension. Only their eyes moved.

"These men," Harsch said, "fascinated Stacker. I told you he was crazy in some ways. He reckoned that if anybody could lead him to the heart of the city he kept on talking about, these people could. Night after night, they were always there. God knows what they wanted! Stacker called them *'the impotent specters of the feast.'*"

"They're still there," Ruddigori said unexpectedly. "You find them lurking in the doorways of any big city. I've wondered about them myself."

That was unexpected. It was not policy to wonder about anything not directly connected with Supernova. Harsch raised his hand to Harry, a recrudescence of hope making him gangle again.

The solidscreen blanked, then was filled with form once more. An overhead camera tracked two men down a canal-side walk; the two men were Art Stacker and his cub assistant, Harsch Berlin.

"In this shot," the mature Harsch told his audience, "you see me and Stacker going along to the home of one of these night-birds; I tagged along just for the laughs."

The two figures paused outside a little tailor's shop, looking doubtfully at the sign which read simply: A. WILLITTS TAILOR.

"I have the feeling we are going to turn up something big," Art was saying tensely as the sound came on. *"We're going to hear what a city really is, from someone who must have felt its atmosphere most keenly. But it won't be pleasant, I warn you, Harsch. You stay here if you'd prefer."*

"Gee, Art," the youngster protested, *"if something big's going to break, I naturally want to be in on it."*

Art looked speculatively at his assistant.

"I don't suppose there'll be any money in this, son," he said.

"I know that, Art. I don't only think of money; what do you take me for? This is something Philosophical, isn't it?"

"Yeah. I guess it is."

They went together into the little shop.

Darkness reigned inside. It seemed to seep out of the black G-suits which were the tailor's specialty; they hung stiff and bulky all round the walls, funereal in the gloom. The tailor, Willitts, was a

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little newt of a man; his features were recognizable as one of the Concourse nightwatchers. Art's underlings had trailed him to this lair.

Willitts' eyes bulged and glistened like those of a drowning rat. He was melancholy and undershot. He denied ever going to Bosphorus Concourse. When Art persisted, he fell silent, dangling his little fingers against the counter.

"I'm not a policeman," Art said. *"I'm just curious. I want to know why you stand there every night the way you do."*

"It's nothing to be ashamed of," Willitts muttered, dropping his eyes. *"I don't do anything."*

"That's just it," Art said eagerly. *"You don't do anything. Why do you—and the others like you—stand there not doing anything? What are you thinking of? What do you see?"*

"I've got my business to attend to, Mister," Willitts protested. *"I'm busy. Can't you see I'm busy?"*

"Answer my questions and I'll go away."

"We could make it worth your while, Willitts," young Harsch insinuated, patting his breast pocket.

The little man's eyes were furtive. He licked his lips. He looked so tired, you would think there was not a spark of blood in him.

"Leave me alone," he said. *"That's all I ask—just leave me alone. I'm not hurting you am I? A customer might come in any time. I'm not answering your questions. Now please beat it out of here."*

"We've got ways and means of getting the answers we want," Harsch threatened.

"Leave me alone, you young thug. If you touch me, I'll call the —"

Unexpectedly, Art jumped on him, pinning the little fellow down backwards across the counter, holding him by his thin shoulders. Of the two, Art's face was the more desperate.

"Come on, Willitts," he said. *"I've got to know. I've* got *to know. I've been digging down deeper into this cesspit of a city week after week, and you're the cockroach I've found creeping round at the bottom of it. You're going to tell me what it feels like down there or, so help me, I'll break your neck."*

"How can I tell you?" Willitts demanded with sudden, mouselike fury. *"I can't tell you. I can't—I haven't got the words. You'd have to be ... my sort before you could savvy."*

And although Art knocked the little tailor about and pulled his hair out, he got nothing more from him than that. In the end they gave it up and left Willitts panting, lying behind his counter in the dust.

"I didn't mean to lose control of myself like that," Art said, licking his knuckles as he emerged from the shop. He must have known the

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camera was on him, but was too preoccupied to care. *"Something just went blank inside me. We've all got our hatreds far too ready, I guess. But I* must *find out . . ."*

His set face loomed larger and larger in the screen, eclipsing all else. One eyelid was flickering uncontrollably. He moved out of sight, still talking.

The screen went blank.

"Terrific stuff!" Tony Caley shouted. "It should go over big."

Everyone was talking in the audience now, except the big chief; they had all enjoyed the beating up.

"Seriously," Barnes was saying, "that last scene did have something. You could replay it with proper actors, have a few bust teeth and things and it would really be solid. Maybe finish with the little guy getting knocked into the canal."

Timing his exits was a specialty with Harsch. He had them all awake and now he would show them no more. Hands in pockets, he came slowly down the few steps into the auditorium.

"So there's the story of a jerk called Art Stacker for you, fellows," he said, as his right foot left the last step. "He couldn't take it. The solid business was too tough for him. Right there and then, after he beat up the tailor, he dropped everything and disappeared into the stews of New Union. He didn't even stay to round off his picture, and Unit Two folded up. He was a *real* quitter, was Art."

Ruddy came up to Harsch and said, "You have me interested. How come, though, we've had to wait twenty years to hear all this?"

Carefully, Harsch spread his hands wide and smiled.

"Because Stacker was a dirty word round here when he first quit," he said, aiming his voice not at Ruddy but at Mr. Wreyermeyer, "and after that he was forgotten and his work was tucked away. Then—well, it happened I ran into Stacker a couple of days back, and that gave me the idea of working over the old Unit Two files."

He tried to move in front of Mr. Wreyermeyer, to make it easier for the big chief to compliment him on his sagacity if he felt so inclined; but Ruddy got in the way again.

"You mean Art's still alive?" Ruddy persisted. "He must be quite an old man now. What's he doing, for heaven's sake?"

"He's just a down-and-out," Harsch said. "I didn't care to be seen talking to him, so I got away from him as soon as possible. Man, he stinks!"

He shook Ruddy off and stood before the big chief.

"Well, Emile," he said, as calmly as he could, "don't tell me you don't smell a solid there—something to sweep 'em off their feet and knock 'em in the aisles."

As if deliberately prolonging the suspense, Mr. Wreyermeyer took another drag on his mescahale be-

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fore removing it from his mouth.

"We'd have to have a pair of young lovers in it," he said stonily.

The old sucker had fallen for it!

"Sure," Harsch exclaimed, scowling to hide his elation. "Two pairs of young lovers! Anything you say, Emile."

Tony Caley was also there, trying to horn in on his boss's success.

"And these guys in the doorways, Mr. Wreyermeyer," he said eagerly, "maybe they could be galactic spies and we could make it into a thriller, hey?"

"Yep, that figures," Tony's yes-man declared, smacking the palm of his hand with his fist. "And this Art Stacker could be their dupe, see, and we could have him shot up in the end, see."

"Not too much shooting," Barnes interrupted. "I see it more as a saga of the common man, and we could call it *Our Town* or something—if that title isn't under copyright."

"How about *Starry Sidewalks* for a name?" someone else suggested.

"It's a vehicle for Eddie Clapworth!" Hi Pilloi shouted.

The boys were playing with it. Harsch had won his round; man, how he loved himself!

He was hustling out of the little theatre with the rest of them when Ruddy touched his arm.

"You never told me, Harsch," he said, "just how you happened to find Art again."

There was something subversive about Ruddy; it was a miracle he had climbed as high as he had. He was forever asking questions.

"It was like this," Harsch said. "I happened to have a rendezvous with some dame a couple of nights back. I was looking for a taxi-bubble afterwards—there weren't many about, because this was the early hours of the morning, and I had to walk through Bosphorus Concourse. This old guy hanging about in a doorway recognized me and called out to me."

"And it was Art?" Ruddy enquired excitedly.

"It was Art all right. He'd have kept me talking all night if I hadn't been firm. But at least it put me onto the concept of this solid. Well, see you tomorrow, Ruddy."

"Just a minute, Harsch. This is important. Didn't Art say if he had found out what was at the heart of the city? That was what he'd gone looking for, wasn't it?"

"Yeah. Oh, he found it all right. He wanted to tell me *all* about it—at two in the morning! I told him what he could do!"

"But what did he *say*, Harsch?"

"Hell, man, Ruddy, what's it matter what a broken-down bum like Stacker said or didn't say? It was his usual patter, but even worse to understand than in the old days—you know, Philosophical. I was pretty plastered, I couldn't bother to take it in."

"But had he found the secret he was chasing?"

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"So he said—but whatever it was, it had strictly no cash value. His pants were in rags, I tell you; the crazy guy was shivering all the time. Say, I must move. See you, Ruddy."

They made the solid. It was one of Supernova's big budget productions for the year. It raked in the money on every inhabited planet of the Region, and Hirsch Berlin was a made man thereafter. They called it *Song of a Mighty City*; it had three top bands, seventeen hit tunes and a regiment of dancing girls. The whole thing was reshot in the studios in the pastel shades deemed most appropriate for a musical, and they finally picked on a more suitable city than New Union for the locale. Art Stacker, of course, did not come into it at all.

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I've never understood why Hollywood changed Dick Matheson's THE SHRINKING MAN *to* THE INCREDIBLE SHRINKING MAN. *Personally I like my shrinkings (or any other unlikely phenomena) to be as credible as the author can make them. In a change of pace from his satires, Ron Goulart lends unusual credibility to the theme of variations in body size—not, to be sure, by scientific plausibility in the physiological process, but by acute conviction in the psychological reactions to the experience.*

...and Curiouser

by RON GOULART

...she was now about two feet high, and was going on shrinking rapidly ... she soon made out that she was in the pool of tears which she had wept when she was nine feet tall.

ALICE'S ADVENTURES IN WONDERLAND

SAM MORRIS DIDN'T THINK ABOUT IT until a minute or so after he'd kissed her. "Just heavy traffic on the freeway after the canal turnoff. And I got stuck right to five with MacDonald," he was saying, wondering if he'd chewed enough mints and looking for a hanger for his coat. "I haven't stopped to have a drink for over a month." He turned to look at his wife.

Connie smiled a little nervously, pulling at her sweater in back. "I was worried a bit, Sam. I'm sorry. It's one of my conditioned responses."

He looked down at her feet. She was wearing the mukluks he'd given her for her birthday two years back. "Connie, were you standing on something when I came in?"

She walked by him and started for the kitchen. "No, Sam. I grew two inches is all."

The cream-colored door slammed after her.

"OK, so you got a good exit line. Now, damnit, what are you talking about?" he said looking into the kitchen.

Connie was bent down examining something in the oven of the bright white stove. "A roast'd be nice tonight, I thought, Sam."

Sam took a cigarette out of the pack in his shirt pocket. Lighting it, he straddled the tube kitchen chair nearest his wife. "You men-

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tioned, sweet, that you'd grown two inches. Did you do that today while I was in the city? I often wonder what you do while I'm away at the office."

Connie let the oven flip shut. "I just got the idea you liked taller women." She managed to give the impression that she was looking up at him even though he was sitting down.

"Is that why I married a girl five three?" He remembered to puff his cigarette.

"I'm not talking about who you married. I said what I thought you liked."

"Connie." Sam stood. "It's nearly a year since we left Earth, huh?" Close to her he realized she was two inches taller all right. "Really, Connie, coming to Peregrine, getting transferred, was the right change. The sort of thing on Earth, it hasn't happened here. I think I'm reformed or whatever and it won't." He touched her hair.

Connie turned half to him. "Maybe, Sam." Then she walked away to the dishware cabinet.

"Why don't you have me trailed?" He reached for the knob on the kitchen door. Stopped and threw his cigarette at the sink. As it fizzled he came back to Connie. "How in the Christ did you grow two inches?"

Connie dodged and set dishes on the table. "What I do during the day, Sam, if you're interested. What I do here one hundred and fifty-three miles from the city." She went to the sink and fished out the cigarette butt, dumping it in the plastic bag by the vacuum closet. "What I do is sit here for awhile and enjoy the climate."

"We decided on this because of your allergies," Sam said.

"Then if I'm in an out-going mood I drive to our nearest neighbor. That is twenty-six miles. To give you the details."

"I know where the Fulmers live."

"But once in awhile I go further away. To those hills over there."

Out of the small kitchen window only the dry yellow earth and the fuzzy joshua trees showed. To see the hills you had to go into the living room.

"And the exercise made you grow."

"I found a place over there. I don't understand it yet. There's a pool, too. I've been swimming there." She bent to look at the roast again. "Like about last week I was thinking that maybe if I was taller things would be better. And I was. That was while I was in the pool. But then I came home and found out I could be taller if I wanted to. Or go back to my old height."

Sam sat down. "That's ridiculous."

"Probably. It's true. Today I just decided to grow." Something in a pot on the top of the stove began to make bubbling sounds. "That's all." Connie got a holder and car-

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ried the pot to the drain board.

When Connie served dinner Sam moved in his chair so he would be facing his plate. After he finished the chocolate pudding Sam said, "You're not kidding, are you, Connie?"

She cleared her throat. "No."

"Well." Sam picked up his coffee cup, put it down. "I've been trying to come up with the right little saying. You know—the old Venusian Schoolmaster says, 'Don't mess with the universe.' You think, Connie, the pool is dangerous?"

"I had an examination last week. Remember, Sam? The day you took the trip. I'm healthy. Except for the allergies, of course."

He wanted to keep away from that. The pool might be OK. It was probably good for Connie to be occupied with something. "I remember some more maxims. But they date back to my days in Columbus, on Earth. When I didn't know there was a planet named Peregrine." He looked at his wife and decided to add, "Or a girl named Connie. You want to be two inches taller, be." If she really got involved with this it might eventually be possible to stay in the city on a weekend now and then. Sam smiled at Connie and finished his coffee, even though it was cold now.

It took Sam only a week or so to become used to his wife's new height. By the time he went to the six-planet sales meeting for his agency he was adjusted to kissing her two inches higher than formerly.

He was on Gamaliel for four days. He had planned on three but hadn't expected to run into the girl who headed the food copy group on Barnum.

Sam got back to his home on the desert early on a dry afternoon. A sharp wind was starting to come up and the joshua trees were getting more askew. The hills seemed closer.

Connie wasn't in the house. Sam sat on the edge of a sofa chair for several minutes, then decided to take a shower.

He was in the stall, trying to decide what sort of a song he was in the mood to sing, when he heard a crashing in the back yard. It sounded like the old swing had collapsed. Turning off the water Sam put on his robe and wrapped a towel around his head. The first few steps his bare feet made dark footprints on the rug.

Out by the garage area Connie was standing with her hands behind her back. "Sam," she said. "I didn't know you were back. "How was the trip?"

Sam stepped onto the porch. The swing he'd put out by the garage was bent and tangled in a heap. He was halfway down the gravel path, walking gingerly, when the thing hit him this time. He looked over at Connie alongside the ga-

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rage and the relationship finally impressed him. "Connie, why in the hell are you nine feet tall?"

Connie made a vague gesture with her right hand. "I didn't know you were going to be back until dinner time."

Sam backed away a few feet. "What's that got to do with it?"

"Well, I got to wondering yesterday what it would be like to be nine feet tall." She frowned and looked off. "Now, don't think I'm silly, but I was wondering how those, you know, circus people feel. It's really not as interesting as I thought. Even wondering how it feels to be a short Venusian."

Sam took the towel off his head.

"I'm sorry about the swing," Connie said. "I got tired. I was out in the hills swimming."

Sam made a ball out of the towel.

"I was worried, Sam. I thought you maybe met a girl on Gamaliel. A model, probably. Like Noreen, was it? I knew if all your agency people from six planets get together there'd be women around and all. It was Noreen, wasn't it?"

"Which time?" Sam threw his towel at the barbecue pit and went into the house.

When he finished his second shower he found Connie in the living room watching the Kine. She was back to her usual size. Or rather she was two inches taller, but Sam had adjusted to that.

Sam decided to call his wife every morning and usually each afternoon for awhile. He couldn't tell from her voice if she was the right size, but he didn't want her to feel alone. He tried not to be late more than one night a week and made sure he usually left the city before five.

The day of Connie's twenty-ninth birthday Sam left his office at noon and bought, when he got to the shopping center nearest home, two quarts of strawberry ice cream, teleported fresh daily from Mars, and three pounds of sugar cookies, made from an exclusive old Earth recipe. For himself he'd got a funny paper hat and for Connie a bottle of perfume, a bracelet and two pairs of earrings. The girl who headed the Barnum food group was on Peregrine doing a motivation study and she helped Sam pick out the earrings.

It was a warm day and the desert flickered beyond their low white bungalow. Sam tooted the horn twice, then played a Strauss waltz on it. He scooped all the gifts up, first putting on his funny hat, and went skipping up to the front door.

He felt silly, but he wanted Connie to have a simple, even banal birthday without any worries.

The doorbell had a prearranged tune so he had to satisfy himself by tapping out Strauss on the door with his knee.

He stopped after awhile and started listening. Finally he heard Connie coming. She smiled when

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she saw him. She was wearing pedal pushers and a white blouse. "Sam!"

"The same. Your childish husband is here to help you recapture lost time. Happy birthday." He pushed into the house.

Connie moved out of his way, her hands absently tucking her blouse in behind. "That's fine, Sam."

Sam went on to the kitchen and dropped everything on the table. "We'll have a party and then play games."

From the hall Connie said, "I'd rather just have a drink right now, Sam."

Sam picked out the packages that were Connie's gifts and took them with him out into the hall. Connie wasn't there. Sam didn't call, he moved quietly along the carpet to the door of the bedroom.

Connie was stuffing something in the bottom drawer of her bureau.

"So!" Sam said. "Who's hiding in there among the linen?"

"Sam, be funny someplace else for a minute. Go away."

"Why? I was invited to this party." He dropped the presents on the bed.

"I'll be with you in a second, Sam. Now go away."

Sam pushed her gently aside and opened the drawer. Rolled up under the pillowcases was a little girl's pink party dress. "You planning to have a little girl? You hadn't mentioned it."

"Shut up, Sam. Just shut the hell up and get out." She swept the tissue-wrapped packages away and dropped down on the bed.

"Connie, what's the matter?" Sam set the dress over a chair back.

"Nothing. Go away."

Sam went around the bed and picked up the three boxes. He shook the perfume package but it didn't rattle. "Connie, were you changing again? Why, this time?"

Not really to him she said, "OK. I got to thinking what it'd be like to have the sort of party I used to. Back in Chicago. When I was seven or eight."

"Where'd you get the dress?"

"I drove into the village shopping center yesterday."

"Christ, Connie. I don't know." Sam sat down on the bed, stuffed the packages in his coat pocket. He decided he'd have to devote himself to Connie almost entirely for awhile. But it would have to be a couple of weeks before he could really do that.

Sam ran his hand softly along Connie's back. "Come on into the kitchen before the ice cream melts."

The next week Sam gathered up travel folders from the spacelines, the teleport office and even the Earth J.C. When his vacation came he wanted to go someplace with Connie, someplace with grandeur and a touch of romance, and convince her that he loved her now and could be trusted.

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It was a cool night when he spread the posters, folders, publicity releases out on the rug. He edged around the arrangement to switch on the heating unit. The Mars folder near the outlet fluttered. "Myself I think it's too hokey to go back where we had our honeymoon," Sam said, moving a coaster across the coffee table to meet his drink.

"You're really serious about going, Sam?" Connie said, leaning forward on the sofa.

"Sure." He cleared a space in the center of the rug and sat cross-legged. "I thought maybe even Earth. You can get a cheap nonstop now. Cheaper than the teleport deal. And if we went by spaceship we could see more on the way."

Connie picked up the decanter and added more scotch to her drink. "You go ahead, Sam. You need a rest."

"Damn, what's wrong, Connie? This is a me-and-you type vacation."

"We've been married five years, Sam. Knock on wood." She tapped the leg of the coffee table. "Maybe it's time we started separate vacations."

"Just drop the sentimental gestures, Connie. I want to do it this way." He reached out and grabbed a Venus folder. "Venus. How's that?"

"I'd just as well stay here, Sam." She finished her drink and stood up. "You might take Kathy."

"Who is Kathy?" he said, opening a Mars booklet.

"Nobody. Don't look up. Nobody, Sam."

He stood and went to the window. "Since we came here, Connie. You know yourself . . ."

"You've done this bit already, Sam. OK, forget it."

Still not turning he said, in a louder voice, "Damnit, Connie, I am making noble sacrifices all over the place to prove my love and all that crap and you are being pretty god damned bitchy."

In leaving the room Connie trampled five separate travel folders. "Anyway, I have things to keep me busy here at home, Sam. And it's good for any allergies here."

Sam gathered up his folders one by one and went to the kitchen. He jerked open the disposal panel and threw them in. "Look, Connie, don't start up any nasty routines again. For a whole year I have been a damn model husband. But if you want to be snotty I can sure as hell fall back into my old evil ways."

"That's kind of an ambiguous threat, Sam." Connie perched on the edge of the table. "At first, actually, I just fooled around with my size to try to please you. But now, really, it's interesting enough in itself. I don't need you, Sam. I don't want a vacation. I just want to stay here." She smiled at him. "And I'm getting better, Sam. I

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can grow quite large, or get very small."

"Well, that's very nice, Connie. You have found yourself a new hobby. No sir, you don't need me anymore. Goodby to old Sam."

Connie gathered up her knees. "You make a hobby of being in the sack with every woman on six planets. OK, so I have a hobby, too."

"Just knock it off."

Connie grinned. "Look, Sam. For instance." Slowly, still smiling, Connie started to shrink. When she was three inches high she stopped and waved at Sam.

It was too warm in the kitchen. Too warm in the house. Sam went out.

The wind across the desert was cold. The joshua trees bobbed and shivered. Sam walked two miles away from the house. He even considered trying to find the pool, damming it up, filling it in. But Connie didn't even have to go back there anymore.

All right, he could make one more effort to win her over to the vacation idea. Then, by Christ, it might just be Kathy.

When he came back Connie wouldn't answer him. It was even warmer in the house. Sam went into the clean white kitchen. His wife was not by the table.

"Connie!" he called. And he kept calling until it hurt him to.

All at once Sam clenched his fists and said, "OK, God damn it!" He jerked the insect swatter off the wall.

Half crouching he started carefully through the house, the swatter behind his back. "Here, Connie," he said in a level voice. "Come on, Connie. Here now."

He was still that way, slightly stooped and calling softly, when Connie stepped on the house and smashed it.

Coming Next Month

Nothing that F&SF has ever published has drawn warmer praise from readers or more urgent demands for more than Zenna Henderson's moving stories of The People. It's especially gratifying, therefore, to be able to announce that our next issue (on the stands around May 1) will feature these interstellar exiles in a new long novelet, *Babylon.* The other feature novelet will be one of the rare science-fantasy adventures of the Saint: *The Questing Tycoon,* in which Leslie Charteris' brighter buccaneer encounters authentic voodoo in Haiti. In addition, there'll be shorter stories by Miriam Allen deFord, Rog Phillips and other regulars—plus the s.f. debut of one of today's liveliest writers of international intrigue, Edward S. Aarons.

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Recommended Reading

by ANTHONY BOUCHER

BELATEDLY THE NEWS TRICKLES through that the International Fantasy Award, presented at last year's World Science Fiction Convention in London, went to J. R. R. Tolkien's THE LORD OF THE RINGS.

As regular readers of this department may guess, I could not be more delighted. This superb trilogy—consisting of THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE RING, THE TWO TOWERS and THE RETURN OF THE KING (Houghton Mifflin, $5 each)—is one of the major achievements of epic imagination in our lifetimes, and your life is the poorer if you have failed to read it. One warning, however: Tolkien's Middle World is, like Baker Street or the Land of Oz, a trap with a firm and powerful grip. Enthusiasm may here pass easily into mania; and once infected by Tolkien's magic, you may never again quite reenter this "real" 1958 world of satellites and ICBMs and segregation and recession.

Allen & Unwin, Tolkien's London publishers, have disclosed that the perfectionist scholar is now "working as best he can on THE SILMARILLION, which might best be described as the source book for THE LORD OF THE RINGS. We cannot," they add, "hold out any hope that it will be published this year." This is news which should reduce at least the English-speaking suicide rate to zero; who could willingly depart from a life which holds such a treasure in its future?

I can foresee that some month it may be necessary to devote the whole of this department to the latest publications of Arthur C. Clarke, who is not only one of the best but also one of the most prolific writers of the fact and fiction of the future.

This month, however, there are a mere four books by Clarke on hand, headed by his fourth collection of short stories, THE OTHER SIDE OF THE SKY (Harcourt, Brace, $3.95). Of the 24 stories in this volume, 9 are from these pages; so you should be not unfamiliar with the tone and quality. Almost half the contents has appeared in book form elsewhere; but still this gathering seems fresh and welcome, because what Clarke emphasizes here is his simple, lively, pointed tales of the immediate next-step-into-space future.

I've spoken before of the great post-Sputnik problem in science fiction: how to appeal to potential new readers, lacking any conceptual background, without boring the old

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hands. In most of the stories here, Clarke's skill as a writer, his insight into ordinary people and his eye for convincing detail enable him to fascinate the jaded habitué with a story so apparently simple that the tyro will be equally delighted. Here, for instance, are the *Venture to the Moon* stories, which you'll remember from their appearance here, and the series which gives the volume its title, a similar sextet (from *Infinity*) of amusing and illuminating anecdotes concerning the first manned satellite station. These 12 tales appeared in America in s.f. magazines, but in England in one of the largest mass-circulation newspapers. Clarke shows every sign of being science fiction's most successful Apostle to the Gentiles since Jules Verne; and I doubt if you can find a better collection than this for the conversion of your curious but skeptical friends.

Of the two recently reprinted Clarke novels, EARTHLIGHT (1955; Ballantine, $2.75; paper, 35¢) is in this same next-step manner of immediacy and clarity. THE CITY AND THE STARS (1956; Signet, 35¢) is in Clarke's contrasting vein of poetic symbolism and vast, almost mythical scope. Both are among the finest novels in modern s.f. Clarke's nonfiction THE MAKING OF A MOON (1957; Harper, $3.50) is not merely reprinted but extensively (and admirably) revised, with many shrewd comments on Sputnik and its implications—a book even more desirable than it was in its excellent original form.

A large proportion of s.f. these days is imported from England; and the quality of these imports is, to put it politely, variable.

First comes the work of such masters as Clarke and John Wyndham, who has recently observed, with great good sense, "I believe there are plenty of people in the world who like imaginative projections honestly carried out, but who get bored to death by scientific exhibitionism. So let us be more implicit and less explicit—let us consider the things that might happen, not to the inhabitants of Uranus, but to us, our friends, the things we know." What Mr. Wyndham considers in THE MIDWICH CUCKOOS (Ballantine, $3.50) is the interplanetary impregnation of every fertile female in a quiet English village. I am uncertain how specifically this falls under "the things that might happen"; but granted the conception (and conceptions), at once comic and terrifying, there could be no more convincing (or entertaining) exposition of human reactions. From one of the oddest and most provocative of recent themes, Wyndham has developed a singularly charming and believable book.

Somewhat below the Wyndham level, but still good value, is Fred Hoyle's THE BLACK CLOUD (Harper, $2.95). The daring and controversial astronomer proves a surpris-

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ingly conventional and even old-fashioned novelist; I can't remember when I last read a book which was simply a historical account of the possible destruction of the world and how a brilliant eccentric scientist averted it. But no matter how many times you have read this story in your youth, you'll still find interest in Mr. Hoyle's retelling, chiefly because of his gift for writing extensive scientific (even mathematical) exposition and deduction with such extraordinary clarity that the layman feels as if he were engaged in scientific reasoning himself. If Clarke writes *science fiction* and Wyndham science *fiction,* Hoyle's book is *science* fiction—and it's good to see that severe classic form revived.

Then one slips on down the scale to makeweight English hackwork. Charles Eric Maine's WORLD WITHOUT MEN (Ace, 35¢) is about a wholly successful oral contraceptive which demoralizes society and (for reasons which are never quite clear) causes the extinction of the male sex. The resultant all-female civilization, based on homosexuality and parthenogenesis, maintains itself unchanged for five millennia until a research biologist creates a male embryo . . . Maine reveals neither the technical nor the intellectual capacity to develop material which could have been significant, but is merely sensational. E. C. Tubb's THE MECHANICAL MONARCH (Ace, 35¢), published in England as ENTERPRISE 2115 by "Charles Grey," is also about a future Matriarchy, run by a Giant Brain, and so compounded of crude clichés of prose and character that Maine's effort looks like genuine extrapolative fiction. Double-bound with Tubb is a not much more successful American venture: Charles L. Fontenay's TWICE UPON A TIME, a routine Space Patrol exploit with hardly a glint of the imaginative individuality of Fontenay's best short stories.

Richard Matheson's novels, good though they are, have also been disappointing in comparison to his shorts; but now, in his first hardcover book-length, he finally hits his novelistic stride. A STIR OF ECHOES (Lippincott, $3) is labeled by the publishers "A Novel of Menace"—and the new tag is apposite for this book which is at once a mystery-suspense thriller (with a startling surprise solution) and a powerful science-fantasy of psionic powers. Careless playing with hypnosis opens up the entire uncontrolled potential of the mind of an ordinary young man; he finds that his new gifts make him anything but the conventional s.f. superman —rather he is the impotent victim of unpredictably capricious forces. In his writing of the quietly naturalistic background to this melodrama, his creation of a sunny suburban street hiding intrigue, evil and death, Matheson suggests that he may well be the successor

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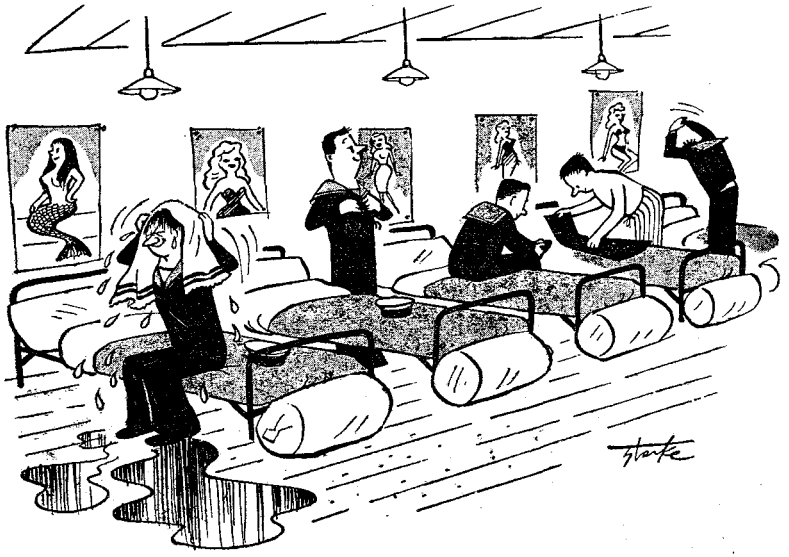
to Cornell Woolrich in his sharp evocation of the terror latent in everyday existence.

Short story notes: Murray Leinster's OUT OF THIS WORLD (Avalon, $2.75) contains the 4 stories which appeared in *Thrilling Wonder* in 1947 (as by "William Fitzgerald") about Bud Gregory, the illiterate hillbilly with an intuitive understanding of nuclear physics. Here typographically disguised as a novel, they still seem so excessively extravagant that I (at least) can find them neither credible nor comic. . . . Robert Bloch's TERROR IN THE NIGHT (Ace, 35¢) contains 7 crime stories of which the last 2 are also fantasies. To regular fantasy readers, the themes may be familiar and predictable; but the deftly ironic execution is characteristic of the author. . . . T. E. Dikty's 5 TALES FROM TOMORROW (Crest, 35¢) range from a joyous *Galaxy* novelet by Simak to an unreadable *Astounding* novella by Cole. All are taken from Dikty's 1955 BEST collection. Albert Compton Friborg's *Careless Love* (F&SF, July, 1954) has been tastefully retitled *Push-Button Passion*. . . . One's only possible complaint about Isak Dinesen's LAST TALES (Random, $4) is that, unlike her previous collections, it includes no out-and-out fantasies. Despite a couple of tenuous borderline entries, I really have no business mentioning it here; but I shall nonetheless insist that it must be read by anyone with the faintest interest in the texture of prose or the art of storytelling.



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Art (and entertainment too, for that matter) is communication . . . and by no means always, or even primarily, on the conscious level. A story (or a painting or a symphony or a ballet) may contain a symbol which communicates immediately and powerfully to the unconscious, with no reference to the conscious subject matter ostensibly communicated; and an editor finds himself fascinated and a little frightened when he publishes a story (Mildred Clingerman's The Wild Wood *is a good example) which evokes such disproportionately intense response as to make it obvious that the author has unconsciously hit upon some basic and deeply communicative symbol. Fritz Leiber—who has not done badly himself, at times, in this matter of symbol-communication—now wryly imagines the effect upon the world of the attainment of the Ultimate Symbol:*

Rump-Titty-Titty-Tum-TAH-Tee

by FRITZ LEIBER

ONCE UPON A TIME, WHEN JUST FOR an instant all the molecules in the world and in the collective unconscious mind got very slippery, so that just for an instant something could pop through from the past or the future or other places, six very important intellectual people were gathered together in the studio of Simon Grue, the accidental painter.

There was Tally B. Washington, the jazz drummer. He was beating softly on a gray hollow African log and thinking of a composition he would entitle "Duet for Water Hammer and Whistling Faucet."

There were Lafcadio Smits, the interior decorator, and Lester Phlegius, the industrial designer. They were talking very intellectually together, but underneath they were wishing very hard that they had, respectively, a really catchy design for modernistic wallpaper and a really new motif for industrial advertising.

There were Gorius James McIntosh, the clinical phychologist, and Norman Saylor, the cultural anthropologist. Gorius James McIntosh was drinking whisky and wishing there were a psychological test that would open up patients a

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lot wider than the Rorschach or the TAT, while Norman Saylor was smoking a pipe but not thinking or drinking anything especially.

It was a very long, very wide, very tall studio. It had to be, so there would be room on the floor to spread flat one of Simon Grue's canvases, which were always big enough to dominate any exhibition with yards to spare, and room under the ceiling for a very tall, very strong scaffold.

The present canvas hadn't a bit of paint on it, not a spot or a smudge or a smear, except for the bone-white ground. On top of the scaffold were Simon Grue and twenty-seven big pots of paint and nine clean brushes, each eight inches wide. Simon Grue was about to have a new accident—a semi-controlled accident, if you please. Any minute now he'd plunge a brush in one of the cans of paint and raise it over his right shoulder and bring it forward and down with a great loose-wristed snap, as if he were cracking a bullwhip, and a great fissioning gob of paint would go *splaaAAT* on the canvas in a random, chance, arbitrary, spontaneous and therefore quintuply accidental pattern which would constitute the core of the composition and determine the form and rhythm for many, many subsequent splatters and maybe even a few contact brush strokes and impulsive smearings.

As the rhythm of Simon Grue's bouncy footsteps quickened, Norman Saylor glanced up, though not apprehensively. True, Simon had been known to splatter his friends as well as his canvasses, but in anticipation of this Norman was wearing a faded shirt, old sneakers and the frayed tweed suit he'd sported as assistant instructor, while his fishing hat was within easy reach. He and his armchair were crowded close to a wall, as were the other four intellectuals. This canvas was an especially large one, even for Simon.

As for Simon, pacing back and forth atop his scaffold, he was experiencing the glorious intoxication and expansion of vision known only to an accidental painter in the great tradition of Wassily Kandinsky, Robert Motherwell and Jackson Pollock, when he is springily based a good twenty feet above a spotless, perfectly prepared canvas. At moments like this he was especially grateful for these weekly gatherings. Having his five especial friends on hand helped create the right intellectual milieu. He listened happily to the hollow rhythmic thrum of Tally's drumming, the multisyllabic rippling of Lester's and Lafcadio's conversation, the gurgle of Gorius' whisky bottle, and happily watched the mystic curls of Norman's pipe-smoke. His entire being, emotions as well as mind, was a blank tablet, ready for the kiss of the universe.

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Meanwhile the instant was coming closer and closer when all the molecules in the world and in the collective unconscious mind would get very slippery.

Tally B. Washington, beating on his African log, had a feeling of oppression and anticipation, almost (but not quite) a feeling of apprehension. One of Tally's ancestors, seven generations back, had been a Dahomey witch doctor, which is the African equivalent of an intellectual with artistic and psychiatric leanings. According to a very private family tradition, half joking, half serious, this five-greats-grandfather of Tally had discovered a Jumbo Magic which could "lay holt" of the whole world and bring it under its spell, but he had perished before he could try the magic or transmit it to his sons. Tally himself was altogether skeptical about the Jumbo Magic, but he couldn't help wondering about it wistfully from time to time, especially when he was beating on his African log and hunting for a new rhythm. The wistful feeling came to him right now, building on the feeling of oppression and anticipation, and his mind became a tablet blank as Simon's.

The slippery instant arrived.

Simon seized a brush and plunged it deep in the pot of black paint. Usually he used black for a final splatter if he used it at all, but this time he had the impulse to reverse himself.

Of a sudden Tally's wrists lifted high, hands dangling loosely, almost like a marionette's. There was a dramatic pause. Then his hands came down and beat out a phrase on the log, loudly and with great authority.

*Rump-titty-titty-tum-*TAH-*tee!*

Simon's wrist snapped and the middle air was full of free-falling paint which hit the canvas in a fast series of *splaaAATs* which was an exact copy of Tally's phrase.

*Rump-titty-titty-tum-*TAH-*tee!*

Intrigued by the identity of the two sounds, and with their back hairs lifting a little for the same reason, the five intellectuals around the wall rose and stared, while Simon looked down from his scaffold like God after the first stroke of creation.

The big black splatter on the bone-white ground was itself an exact copy of Tally's phrase, sound made sight, music transposed into visual pattern. First there was a big roundish blot—that was the *rump*. Then two rather delicate, many-tongued splatters—those were the *titties*. Next a small *rump*, which was the *tum*. Following that a big blot like a bent spearhead, not so big as the *rump* but even more emphatic—the TAH. Last of all an indescribably curled and broken little splatter which somehow seemed exactly right for the *tee*.

The whole big splatter was as like the drummed phrase as an identical twin reared in a different

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environment and as fascinating as a primeval symbol found next to bison paintings in a Cro-Magnon cave. The six intellectuals could hardly stop looking at it and when they did, it was to do things in connection with it, while their minds were happily a-twitter with all sorts of exciting new projects.

Simon's wide-angle camera was brought into play on the scaffold and negatives were immediately developed and prints made in the darkroom adjoining the studio. Each of Simon's friends carried at least one print when he left. They smiled at each other like men who share a mysterious but powerful secret. More than one of them drew his print from under his coat on the way home and hungrily studied it.

At the gathering next week there was much to tell. Tally had introduced the phrase at a private jam session and on his live jazz broadcast. The jam session had improvised on and developed the phrase for two solid hours and the musicians had squeaked with delight when Tally finally showed them the photograph of what they had been playing, while the response from the broadcast had won Tally a new sponsor with a fat pocketbook.

Gorius McIntosh had got phenomenal results from using the splatter as a Rorschach inkblot. His star patient had seen her imagined incestuous baby in it and spilled more in one session than in the previous hundred and forty. Stubborn blocks in two analyses had been gloriously broken, while three catatonics at the state hospital had got up and danced.

Lester Phlegius rather hesitantly described how he was using "something like the splatter, really not too similar" (he said) as an attention-getter in a forthcoming series of Industrial-Design-for-Living advertisements.

Lafcadio Smits, who had an even longer and more flagrant history of stealing designs from Simon, brazenly announced that he had reproduced the splatter as a silk-screen pattern on linen. The pattern was already selling like hotcakes at five arty gift shops, while at this very moment three girls were sweating in Lafcadio's loft turning out more. He braced himself for a blast from Simon, mentally rehearsing the attractive deal he was prepared to offer, one depending on percentages of percentages, but the accidental painter was strangely abstracted. He seemed to have something weighing on his mind.

The new painting hadn't progressed any further than the first splatter.

Norman Saylor quizzed him about it semi-privately.

"I've developed a sort of artist's block," Simon confessed to him with relief. "Whenever I pick up a brush I get afraid of spoiling that first tremendous effect and I don't

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go on." He paused. "Another thing —I put down papers and tried some small test-splatters. They all looked almost exactly like the big one. Seems my wrist won't give out with anything else." He laughed nervously. "How are you cashing in on the thing, Norm?"

The anthropologist shook his head. "Just studying it, trying to place it in the continuum of primitive signs and universal dream symbols. It goes very deep. But about this block and this . . . er . . . fancied limitation of yours—I'd just climb up there tomorrow morning and splatter away. The big one's been photographed, you can't lose that."

Simon nodded doubtfully and then looked down at his wrist and quickly grabbed it with his other hand, to still it. It had been twitching in a familiar rhythm.

If the tone of the gathering after the first week was enthusiastic, that after the second was euphoric. Tally's new drummed theme had given rise to a musical fad christened Drum 'n' Drag which promised to rival Rock 'n' Roll, while the drummer himself was in two days to appear as a guest artist on a network TV program. The only worry was that no new themes had appeared. All the Drum 'n' Drag pieces were based on duplications or at most developments of the original drummed phrase. Tally also mentioned with an odd reluctance that a few rabid cats had taken to greeting each other with a four-handed patty-cake that beat out *rump-titty-titty-tum*-TAH-*tee.*

Gorius McIntosh was causing a stir in psychiatric circles with his amazing successes in opening up recalcitrant cases, many of them hitherto thought fit for nothing but eventual lobotomy. Colleagues with M.D.'s quit emphasizing the lowly "Mister" in his name, while several spontaneously addressed him as "Doctor" as they begged him for copies of the McSPAT (McIntosh's Splatter Pattern Apperception Test). His name had been mentioned in connection with the assistant directorship of the clinic where he was a humble psychologist. In closing he mentioned that some of the state patients had taken to pommeling each other playfully while happily spouting some gibberish variant of the original phrase, such as *"Bump-biddy-biddy-bum*-BAH-*bee!"* The resemblance in behavior to Tally's hepcats was noted and remarked on by the six intellectuals.

The first of Lester Phlegius' attention-getters (identical with the splatter, of course) had appeared and attracted the most favorable notice, meaning chiefly that his customer's front office had received at least a dozen curious phone calls from the directors and presidents of cognate firms. Lafcadio Smits reported that he had rented a second loft, was branching out into dress materials, silk neckties, lampshades and wallpaper, and was deep in

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royalty deals with several big manufacturers. Once again Simon Grue surprised him by not screaming robbery and demanding details and large simple percentages. The accidental painter seemed even more unhappily abstracted than the week before.

When he ushered them from his living quarters into the studio they understood why.

It was as if the original big splatter had whelped. Surrounding and overlaying it were scores of smaller splatters. They were all colors of a well-chosen artist's spectrum, blending with each other and pointing each other up superbly. But each and every one of them was a perfect copy, reduced to one half or less, of the original big splatter.

Lafcadio Smits wouldn't believe at first that Simon had done them free-wrist from the scaffold. Even when Simon showed him details proving they couldn't have been stenciled, Lafcadio was still unwilling to believe, for he was deeply versed in methods of copying designs which had all the effects of spontaneity.

But when Simon wearily climbed the scaffold and, hardly looking at what he was doing, flipped down a few splatters exactly like the rest, even Lafcadio had to admit that something miraculous and frightening had happened to Simon's wrist.

Gorius James McIntosh shook his head and muttered a remark about "stereotyped compulsive behavior at the artistic-creative level. Never heard of it getting *that* stereotyped, though."

Later during the gathering, Norman Saylor again consulted with Simon and also had a long confidential talk with Tally B. Washington, during which he coaxed out of the drummer the whole story of his five-greats-grandfather. When questioned about his own researches, the cultural anthropologist would merely say that they were "progressing." He did, however, have one piece of concrete advice, which he delivered to all the five others just before the gathering broke up.

"This splatter does have an obsessive quality, just as Gory said. It has that maddening feeling of incompleteness which cries for repetition. It would be a good thing if each of us, whenever he feels the thing getting too strong a hold of him, would instantly shift to some engrossing activity which has as little as possible to do with arbitrarily ordered sight and sound. Try to set up a countercompulsion. One of us might even hit on a counterformula—a specific antidote."

If the ominous note of warning in Norman's statement didn't register on all of them just then, it did at some time during the next seven days, for the frame of mind in which the six intellectuals came to

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the gathering after the third week was one of paranoid grandeur and hysterical desperation.

Tally's TV appearance had been a huge success. He'd taken to the TV station a copy of the big splatter and although he hadn't intended to (he said) he'd found himself showing it to the M.C. and the unseen audience after his drum solo. The immediate response by phone, telegram and letter had been overwhelming but rather frightening, including a letter from a woman in Smallhills, Arkansas, thanking Tally for showing her "the wondrous picture of God."

Drum 'n' Drag had become a national and even international craze. The patty-cake greeting had become general among Tally's rapidly-growing horde of fans and it now included a staggering slap on the shoulder to mark the TAH. (Here Gorius McIntosh took a drink from his bottle and interrupted to tell of a spontaneous, rhythmic, lock-stepping procession at the state hospital with an even more violent TAH-blow. The mad march had been forcibly broken up by attendants and two of the patients treated at the infirmary for contusions.) The New York Times ran a dispatch from South Africa describing how police had dispersed a disorderly mob of University of Capetown students who had been chanting, *"Shlump Shliddy Shliddy Shlump* SHLAH *Shlee*!"—which the correspondents had been told was an anti-apartheid cry phrased in pig-Afrikaans.

For both the drummed phrase and the big splatter had become a part of the news, either directly or by inferences that made Simon and his friends alternately wheeze and shudder. An Indiana town was fighting a juvenile phenomenon called Drum Saturday. A radio-TV columnist noted that Blotto Cards were the latest rage among studio personnel; carried in handbag or breast pocket, whence they could be quickly whipped out and stared at, the cards were claimed to be an infallible remedy against boredom or sudden attacks of anger and the blues. Reports of a penthouse burglary included among the objects listed as missing "a recently-purchased spotted linen wall-hanging"; the woman said she did not care about the other objects, but pleaded for the hanging's return, "as it was of great psychological comfort to my husband." Splatter-marked raincoats were a high-school fad, the splattering being done ceremoniously at Drum 'n' Drag parties. An English prelate had preached a sermon inveighing against "this deafening new American craze with its overtones of mayhem." At a press interview Salvador Dali had refused to say anything to newsmen except the cryptic sentence, "The time has come."

In a halting, hiccupy voice Gorius McIntosh reported that things

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were pretty hot at the clinic. Twice during the past week he had been fired and triumphantly reinstated. Rather similarly at the state hospital Bump Parties had been alternately forbidden and then encouraged, mostly on the pleas of enthusiastic psychiatric aides. Copies of the McSPAT had come into the hands of general practitioners who, ignoring its original purpose, were using it as substitutes for electroshock treatment and tranquilizing drugs. A group of progressive psychiatrists calling themselves the Young Turks were circulating a statement that the McSPAT constituted the worst threat to classical Freudian psychoanalysis since Alfred Adler, adding a grim scholarly reference to the Dancing Mania of the Middle Ages. Gorius finished his report by staring around almost frightenedly at his five friends and clutching the whisky bottle to his bosom.

Lafcadio Smits seemed equally shaken, even when telling about the profits of his pyramiding enterprises. One of his four lofts had been burglarized and another invaded at high noon by a red-bearded Greenwich Village Satanist protesting that the splatter was an illicitly procured Taoist magic symbol of direst power. Lafcadio was also receiving anonymous threatening letters which he believed to be from a criminal drug syndicate that looked upon Blotto Cards as his creation and as competitive to heroin and lesser forms of dope. He shuddered visibly when Tally volunteered the information that his fans had taken to wearing Lafcadio's splatter-patterned ties and shirts.

Lester Phlegius said that further copies of the issue of the costly and staid industrial journal carrying his attention-getter were unprocurable and that many had vanished from private offices and wealthy homes or, more often, simply had the crucial page ripped out.

Norman Saylor's two photographs of the big splatter had been pilfered from his locked third-floor office at the university, and a huge copy of the splatter, painted in a waterproof black substance, had appeared on the bottom of the swimming pool in the girls' gymnasium.

As they continued to share their experiences, it turned out that the six intellectuals were even more disturbed at the hold the drummed phrase and the big splatter had got on them individually and at their failure to cope with the obsession by following Norman's suggestion. Playing at a Sunday-afternoon bar concert, Tally had got snagged on the phrase for fully ten minutes, like a phonograph needle caught in one groove, before he could let go. What bothered him especially was that no one in the audience had seemed to notice and he had the conviction that if something hadn't stopped him (the drum skin ruptured) they would have sat

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frozen there, wrists flailing, until he died of exhaustion.

Norman himself, seeking escape in chess, had checkmated his opponent in a blitz game (where each player must move without hesitation) by banging down his pieces in the *rump-titty* rhythm—and his subconscious mind had timed it, he said, so that the last move came right on the *tee*; it was a little pawn-move after a big queen-check on the TAH. Lafcadio, turning to cooking, had found himself mixing salad with a *rump-titty* flourish. ("...and a madman to mix it, as the old Spanish recipe says," he finished with a despairing giggle.) Lester Phlegius, seeking release from the obsession in the companionship of a lady spiritualist with whom he had been carrying on a strictly Platonic love affair for ten years, found himself enlivening with the *rump-titty* rhythm the one chaste embrace they permitted themselves at each meeting. Phoebe had torn herself away and slapped him full-arm across the face. What had horrified Lester was that the impact had coincided precisely with the TAH.

Simon Grue himself, who hadn't stirred out of his apartment all week but wandered shivering from window to window in a dirty old bathrobe, had dozed in a broken armchair and had a terrifying vision. He had imagined himself in the ruins of Manhattan, chained to the broken stones (perhaps because he had both wrists heavily wound with scarves and cloths to cushion the twitching), while across the dusty jagged landscape all humanity tramped in an endless horde screeching the accursed phrase and every so often came a group of them carrying a two-story-high poster ("...like those Soviet parades," he said) with the big splatter staring blackly down from it. His nightmare had gone on to picture the dreadful infection spreading from the Earth by spaceship to planets revolving around other stars.

As Simon finished speaking, Gorius McIntosh rose slowly from his chair, groping ahead of himself with his whisky bottle.

"That's it!" he said from between bared clenched teeth, grinning horribly. "That's what's happening to all of us. Can't get it out of our minds. Can't get it out of our muscles. Psychosomatic bondage!" He stumbled slowly across the circle of intellectuals toward Lester, who was sitting opposite him. "It's happening to me. A patient sits down across the desk and says with his eyes dripping tears, 'Help me, Doctor McIntosh,' and I see his problems clearly and I know just how to help him and I get up and I go around the desk to him"—he was standing right over Lester now, bottle raised high— "and I lean down so that my face is close to his and then I shout RUMP-TITTY-TITTY-TUM-TAH-TEE!"

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At this point Norman Saylor decided to take over, leaving to Tally and Lafcadio the restraining of Gorius, who indeed seemed quite docile and more dazed than anything else now that his seizure was spent, at least temporarily. The cultural anthropologist strode to the center of the circle, looking very reassuring with his pipe and his strong jaw and his smoky tweeds, though he kept his hands clasped tightly together behind him.

"Men," he said sharply, "my research on this thing isn't finished by a long shot, but I've carried it far enough to know that we are dealing with what may be called an ultimate symbol, a symbol that is the summation of all symbols. It has everything in it—birth, death, mating, murder, divine and demonic possession, the whole lot—to such a degree that after you've looked at it, or listened to it, or *made* it, for a time, you simply don't *need* life any more."

The studio was very quiet. The five other intellectuals looked at him. Norman rocked on his heels like any normal college professor, but his arms grew perceptibly more rigid as he clasped his hands even more tightly behind his back, fighting an exquisite compulsion.

"As I say, my studies aren't nearly conclusive, but there's clearly no time to carry them further—we must act on such conclusions as I have drawn from the evidence assembled to date. Here's briefly how it shapes up: We must assume that mankind possesses an actual collective unconscious mind stretching thousands of years into the past and, for all I know, into the future. This collective unconscious mind may be pictured as a great dark space across which radio messages can sometimes pass with difficulty. We must also assume that the drummed phrase and with it the big splatter came to us by this inner radio from an individual living over a century in the past. We have good reason to believe that this individual is, or was, a direct male ancestor, in the seventh generation back, of Tally here. He was a witch doctor. He was acutely hungry for power. In fact, he spent his life seeking an incantation that would put a spell on the whole world. It appears that he found the incantation at the end, but died too soon to be able to use it—without ever being able to embody it in sound or sign. Think of his frustration!"

"Norm's right," Tally said, nodding somberly. "He was a mighty mean man, I'm told, and mighty persistent."

Norman's nod was quicker and also a plea for undivided attention. Beads of sweat were dripping down his forehead. "The thing came to us when it did—came to Tally specifically and through him to Simon—because our six minds, reinforcing each other powerfully, were momentarily open to receive

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transmissions through the collective unconscious, and because there is—was—this sender at the other end long desirous of getting his message through to one of his descendants. We cannot say precisely where this sender is—a scientifically oriented person might say that he is in a shadowed portion of the space-time continuum while a religiously oriented person might aver that he is in Heaven or Hell."

"I'd plump for the last-mentioned," Tally volunteered. "He was that kind of man."

"Please, Tally," Norman said. "Wherever he is, we must operate on the hope that there is a counter formula or negative symbol—yang to this yin—which he wants, or wanted, to transmit too—something that will stop this flood of madness we have loosed on the world."

"That's where I must differ with you, Norm," Tally broke in, shaking his head more somberly than he had nodded it. "If Old Five-Greats ever managed to start something bad, he'd never want to stop it, especially if he knew how. I tell you he was mighty mighty mean and—"

"*Please, Tally*! Your ancestor's character may have changed with his new environment, there may be greater forces at work on him—in any case, our only hope is that he possesses and will transmit to us the counter formula. To achieve that, we must try to recreate, by artificial means, the conditions that obtained in this studio at the time of the first transmission."

A look of acute pain crossed his face. He unclasped his hands and brought them in front of him. His pipe fell to the floor. He looked at the large blister the hot bowl had raised in one palm. Then clasping his hands together in front of him, palm to palm, with a twisting motion that made Lafcadio wince, he continued rapping out the words.

"Men, we must act at once, using only such materials as can be rapidly assembled. Each of you must trust me implicitly. Tally, I know you don't use it any more, but can you still get weed, the genuine crushed leaf? Good, we may need enough for two or three dozen sticks. Gory, I want you to fetch the self-hypnotism rigmarole that's so effective—no, I don't trust your memory and we may need copies. Lester, if you're quite through satisfying yourself that Gory didn't break your collarbone, you go with Gory and see that he drinks lots of coffee. On your way back buy several bunches of garlic, a couple of rolls of dimes, and a dozen red railway flares. Oh yes, and call up your mediumistic lady and do your damnedest to get her to join us here—her talents may prove invaluable. Laf, tear off to your home loft and get the luminous paint and the black velvet hangings you and your red-bearded ex-friend used—yes, I know about that association!

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—when you and he were dabbling with black magic. Simon and I will hold down the studio. All right, then—" A spasm crossed his face and the veins in his forehead and cords in his neck bulged and his arms were jerking with the struggle he was waging against the compulsion that threatened to overpower him. "All right, then—*Rump-titty-titty-tum*-GET-MOVING!"

An hour later the studio smelt like a fire in a eucalyptus grove. Such light from outside as got past the cabalistically figured hangings covering windows and skylight revealed the shadowy forms of Simon, atop the scaffold, and the other five intellectuals, crouched against the wall, all puffing their reefers, sipping the sour smoke industriously. Their marihuana-blanked minds were still reverberating to the last compelling words of Gory's rigmarole, read by Lester Phlegius in a sonorous bass.

Phoebe Saltonstall, who had refused reefers with a simple, "No thank you, I always carry my own peyote," had one wall all to herself. Eyes closed, she was lying along it on three small cushions, her pleated Grecian robe white as a winding sheet.

Round all four walls waist-high went a dimly luminous line with six obtuse angles in it besides the four corners; Norman said that made it the topological equivalent of a magician's pentalpha or pentagram. Barely visible were the bunches of garlic nailed to each door and the tiny silver disks scattered in front of them.

Norman flicked his lighter and the little blue flame added itself to the six glowing red points. In a cracked voice he cried, "The time approaches!" and he shambled about rapidly setting fire to the twelve railway flares spiked into the floor.

In the hellish red glow they looked to each other like so many devils. Phoebe moaned and tossed. Simon coughed once as the dense clouds of smoke billowed up around the scaffold and filled the ceiling.

Norman Saylor cried, "*This is it!*"

Phoebe screamed thinly and arched her back as if in electroshock.

A look of sudden amazement came into the face of Taliaferro Booker Washington, as if he'd been jabbed from below with a pin or hot poker. He lifted his hands with great authority and beat out a short phrase on his gray African log.

A hand holding a brightly-freighted eight-inch brush whipped out of the smoke clouds above and sent down a great fissioning gout of paint that landed on the canvas with a sound that was an exact copy of Tally's short phrase.

Immediately the studio became a

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hive of purposeful activity. Heavily-gloved hands jerked out the railway flares and plunged them into strategically located buckets of water. The hangings were ripped down and the windows thrown open. Two electric fans were turned on. Simon, half-fainting, slipped down the last feet of the ladder, was rushed to a window and lay across it gasping. Somewhat more carefully Phoebe Saltonstall was carried to a second window and laid in front of it. Gory checked her pulse and gave a reassuring nod.

Then the five intellectuals gathered around the big canvas and stared. After a while Simon joined them.

The new splatter, in Chinese red, was entirely different from the many ones under it and it was an identical twin of the new drummed phrase.

After a while the six intellectuals went about the business of photographing it. They worked systematically but rather listlessly. When their eyes chanced to move to the canvas they didn't even seem to see what was there. Nor did they bother to glance at the black-on-white prints (with the background of the last splatter touched out) as they shoved them under their coats.

Just then there was a rustle of draperies by one of the open windows. Phoebe Saltonstall, long forgotten, was sitting up. She looked around her with some distaste.

"Take me home, Lester," she said.

Tally, halfway through the door, stopped. "You know," he said puzzledly, "I still can't believe that Old Five-Greats had the public spirit to do what he did. I wonder if she found out what it was that made him—"

Norman put his hand on Tally's arm and laid a finger of the other on his own lips. They went out together, followed by Lafcadio, Gorius, Lester and Phoebe. Like Simon, all five men had the look of drunkards in a benign convalescent stupor, and probably dosed with paraldehyde, after a bout of DT's.

The same effect was apparent as the new splatter and drummed phrase branched out across the world, chasing and eventually overtaking the first one. Any person who saw or heard it proceeded to repeat it once (make it, show it, wear it, if it were that sort of thing, in any case pass it on) and then forget it—and at the same time forget the first drummed phrase and splatter. All sense of compulsion or obsession vanished utterly.

Drum 'n' Drag died a-borning. Blotto Cards vanished from handbags and pockets, the McSPATs I and II from doctors' offices and psychiatric clinics. Bump Parties no longer plagued and enlivened mental hospitals. Catatonics froze again. The Young Turks went

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back to denouncing tranquilizing drugs. A fad of green-and-purple barberpole stripes covered up splattermarks on raincoats. Satanists and drug syndicates presumably continued their activities unhampered except by God and the Treasury Department. Capetown had such peace as it deserved. Spotted shirts, neckties, dresses, lampshades, wallpaper, and linen wall hangings all became intensely passé. Drum Saturday was never heard of again. Lester Phlegius' second attention-getter got none.

Simon's big painting was eventually hung at one exhibition, but it got little attention even from critics, except for a few heavy sentences along the lines of "Simon Grue's latest elephantine effort fell with a thud as dull as that of the tubs of paint composing it." Visitors to the gallery seemed able only to give it one dazed look and then pass it by, as is not infrequently the case with modern paintings.

The reason for this was clear. On top of all the other identical splatters it carried one in Chinese red that was a negation of all symbols, a symbol that had nothing in it—the new splatter that was the identical twin of the new drummed phrase that was the negation and completion of the first, the phrase that had vibrated out from Tally's log through the red glare and come slapping down out of Simon's smoke cloud, the phrase that stilled and ended everything (and which obviously can only be stated here once): "Tah-*titty-titty-tee*-toe!"

The six intellectual people continued their weekly meetings almost as if nothing had happened, except that Simon substituted for splatterwork a method of applying the paint by handfuls with the eyes closed, later treading it in by foot. He sometimes asked his friends to join him in these impromptu marches, providing wooden shoes imported from Holland for the purpose.

One afternoon, several months later, Lester Phlegius brought a guest with him—Phoebe Saltonstall.

"Miss Saltonstall has been on a round-the-world cruise," he explained. "Her psyche was dangerously depleted by her experience in this apartment, she tells me, and a complete change was indicated. Happily now she's entirely recovered."

"Indeed I am," she said, answering their solicitous inquiries with a bright smile.

"By the way," Norman said, "did you receive any message at the time from Tally's ancestor?"

"Indeed I did," she said.

"Well, what did Old Five-Greats have to say?" Tally asked eagerly. "Whatever it was, I bet he was pretty crude about it!"

"Indeed he was," she said, blushing prettily. "So crude, in fact, that I wouldn't dare attempt to convey that aspect of his message. For that matter, I am sure that it was the

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utter fiendishness of his anger and the unspeakable visions in which his anger was clothed that so reduced my psyche." She paused.

"I don't know where he was sending from," she said thoughtfully. "I had the impression of a warm place, an intensely warm place, though of course I may have been reacting to the railway flares." Her frown cleared. "The actual message was short and simple enough:

" 'Dear Descendant, They *made* me stop it. It was beginning to catch on *down here.*' "

In Memoriam: Henry Kuttner

(*Los Angeles, 1914 — Santa Monica, February 4, 1958*)

Tomorrow and tomorrow bring no more
Beggars in velvet, blind mice, pipers' sons;
The fairy chessmen will take wing no more
In shock and clash by night where fury runs.
A gnome there was, whose paper ghost must know
That home there's no returning — that the line
To his tomorrow went with last year's snow.
Gallegher Plus no longer will design
Robots who have no tails; the private eye
That stirred two-handed engines, no more sees.
No vintage seasons more, or rich or wry,
That tantalize us even to the lees;
Their mutant branch now the dark angel shakes
And happy endings end when the bough breaks.

KAREN ANDERSON

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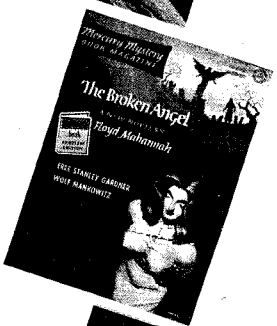

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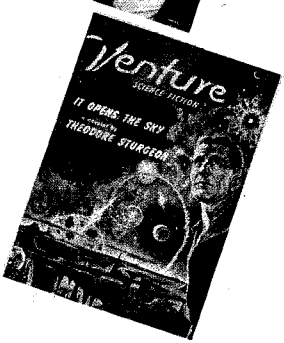

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